

*Water Resources Programs*

the Canada Water Act is the most important piece of legislation which has come before the House this session. It deals with the management of our Canadian water resources and is supposed to be a blueprint for a national attack on water pollution.

Several hon. members have indicated there are so many weaknesses in the bill that the major, all-out attack against our pollution problems will have difficulty in even getting off the ground. The government, and the department in charge, have passed up a golden opportunity to give real leadership in a Canada-wide fight against pollution problems which are destroying the quality of our environment and, in fact, are threatening our very existence. Instead of firm and vigorous leadership in the fight against pollution the bill is an example of a weak, vacillating, ineffective and piecemeal approach to one of the most serious problems facing our nation.

One of the major weaknesses of the bill is the failure of the minister to establish water quality standards for all classes of water in Canada. That is what we are debating this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. We are determined to make a last ditch attempt to have some kind of a national standard written into the bill, which will help to prevent further deterioration in water quality throughout the nation. The more I read the bill, the more I am convinced that the government is on the wrong track, and the more convinced I am that members of the House have not really grasped just what the bill will bring about. Instead of setting up national standards for the various classes of water in Canada, the bill will create a hodge-podge of water quality management areas throughout the nation.

Each management area will be able to set its own standards. These areas will not include an entire river basin. Such an area may include one tributary, or a section of a river. A good example is the intention to set up a management area for the lower Fraser River in British Columbia. As I say, each management area will be able to set its own standards. The bill will allow industry to pay effluent fees to pollute our waters. Quality standards will vary from area to area, and from province to province. This piecemeal approach cannot help but have a detrimental effect on the over-all solution to our pollution problems.

The Government's approach could lead to area competing with area for industry, by deliberately lowering both their water quality standards and their effluent fees. It could lead

[Mr. Harding.]

to province competing against province for industry on the same basis. This piecemeal approach will encourage greater concentration of industry, particularly industries whose effluent is difficult to purify, in areas which have low water quality standards or no standards at all. This means that citizens who live in an industrialized area can expect to have waters of low quality, waters which will be unavailable for many of the uses to which water is normally put and for which there is a growing demand.

The present plan will create pollution havens from one end of Canada to the other. There is no doubt that, as drafted, the bill is a sop to industry, and is an extremely fragmented approach to solving our pollution problems. I cannot understand why the minister and the government are opposed to the setting up of national quality standards for the various classes of water. I cannot understand why all the Liberal members on the National Resources Committee, who last year voted unanimously for national standards, have failed to take a similar stand on this piece of legislation.

**Mr. Alexander:** They have been reached.

**Mr. Greene:** Some people learn.

**Mr. Harding:** In fact, every Liberal member on this year's committee voted against the setting up of national standards, and decided to go along with the piecemeal approach which will result in the setting up of pollution havens throughout the country. It seems to me that the minister received a great deal of bad advice from those who helped him frame the legislation. They certainly did not check very carefully with the Canadian people, nor did they take the advice of many of the provinces and interested organizations.

The people of Canada were looking for leadership. The provinces and the municipalities generally would have accepted federal leadership in a nation wide fight against pollution. The government, the minister and his department have failed to give such leadership. It is difficult to believe that a department could have worked for years on the type of legislation which was brought into this House last fall and which, despite major amendment, still provides a weak, indecisive and fragmented water authority.

The need to fight pollution on a national basis, with broad national guidelines and standards, should be obvious to everyone. It is the only method which will prevent industry