

bill was tabled in this House there would also be tabled an environmental statement.

The importance of that was to allow the public to review decisions being taken by the government and Parliament in the light of their environmental impact. Regrettably this has happened by exception rather than by rule.

The most important policy document of any government is of course its budget. Two and one-half years after this green plan promise we still have not had a budget that has been accompanied by an environmental statement. In fact most bills coming into this House have not come with an environmental statement notwithstanding the promise of the green plan.

What is important about this green plan promise is more than the information it brings to Parliament and therefore to the public. What is important is that it forces policy makers, both from the first moment of conception of policy deep within the bureaucracy to the moment when it appears in this House, to consider the environmental implications of their decisions.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is raising precisely this issue here. On important issues that affect important environmental resources Canada holds the stewardship not only for our own use, enjoyment and future but for the world. Decisions on those resources are being made certainly without adequate attention to the environmental implications of those decisions.

Both the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands and the member who responded for the government referred to the Shipping Act that is now before a legislative committee on which I am also participating. This is a good example of the second element that the motion before us today addresses, which is the need for community involvement.

As a witness before the legislative committee said this morning, people will safeguard those things they love. Whether it is the people of the Gulf Islands or the people in my riding who value their proximity to the Ottawa River and its quality, the people living in a certain environment understand best how it works. They understand how changes to that environment will affect it. That is why it is so important that they be involved in the process of decision making about those resources.

Private Members' Business

The Minister of the Environment has said repeatedly in this House that this was the essential change that took place at the earth summit in Rio, not just the specific conventions, not just agenda 21 which laid out a road map for the next millennium, but the fact that the process of decision making had to change, had to become inclusive, had to become more transparent, had to become more accountable.

What we have seen with the Shipping Act before us is that in fact the industry was consulted and there were substantial face to face discussions hammering out best solutions between industry and government officials. Virtually excluded from that process were environmental organizations that have been involved for many years now with how to prevent oil spills and how to most effectively respond to major oil spills. It is only in the process of the legislative committee that we have seen that in fact this has been a closed process, not an open process. It is exactly the kind of thing that this motion purports to address; the need for the involvement of local people who know the situation, who will live with the results of the decision and who are there as the front line guardians of our environmental resources.

• (1735)

I want to talk particularly about some local issues that affect my riding where this certainly applies. This happens to be our nation's capital. The National Capital Commission, an instrument of the federal government, plays a very important role in this region. It is a far step from the Gulf Islands to a major urban environment but the environmental issues are equally important. To a major extent what we do in our cities has a greater and more damaging impact upon our environment than what we do outside cities.

The National Capital Commission in this region controls or owns one-third of the property on both sides of the river on the Quebec side and on the Ontario side. Therefore it has a substantial ability to influence the decision making of local governments.

In a sense in this region we have the opposite problem to that which the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands was describing. We have the problem of the National Capital Commission taking a hands-off approach and, in my view, not taking enough responsibility to use and implement its obligations under federal environmental assessment legislation to ensure that it is co-operating with local government certainly, but nonetheless that it is