

The Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce

Evidence

Ottawa, Tuesday, November 17, 1970

[Text]

The Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, to which was referred Bill S-5, an act respecting weights and measures, met this day at 9.30 a.m. to give consideration to the bill.

Hon. Salter A. Hayden (*Chairman*) in the Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable senators, our witness is the Honourable Ron Basford, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. With him are Mr. R. W. MacLean, Director of the Standards Branch, Mr. G. E. Anderson, Assistant Director and Chief Engineer, Standards Branch, and Dr. A. E. Douglas, Director of the Division of Physics, National Research Council.

Mr. Minister, would you care to follow the usual practice of making an opening statement?

The Honourable Ron Basford, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs: I have a very short opening statement, Mr. Chairman, which may serve to refresh honourable senators' minds on this bill. In respect of honourable Senator Lang's statement, it is impossible really to add very much to what he said in moving second reading of the bill, because he gave such a very complete and full statement at that time.

Senator Connolly (*Ottawa West*): We will tell him about that, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Basford: Thank you, Senator Connolly. I presume honourable senators have read that very full and complete statement and that, therefore, there is not really much that I need repeat this morning. If I may just recapitulate the real principles of the bill. The purpose of the bill here this morning is really to update the existing Weights and Measures and Units of Measurement Acts which have been in force since 1951. This updating is necessary for several reasons. First, it will permit the regulation of new types of devices and new practices in the weighing and measuring field that are not presently covered by existing legislation such as coin-operated liquid-dispensing machines which are something new since the last act, and machines such as dryers or machines that are selling things on the basis of time, again which were not covered by the existing legislation.

The Chairman: I suppose you are referring to such things as laundromats.

Hon. Mr. Basford: The situation where someone is buying something on time—for instance, where you put in a quarter for so much time; and it was that time of service which was not provided for in the old legislation.

Secondly, it will allow for the present inspections at fixed periods to be replaced by more efficient inspection programs based on sophisticated statistical sampling techniques. That is to say, Mr. Chairman, now under the legislation we have to go around every so many years and inspect every device. We feel on the advice of consultants and engineers that with the improvements in measuring devices and weighing devices, this can be done on a sampling basis and a statistical basis at a saving of expenses and costs and yet still give protection to the commercial community.

Thirdly, it will help to prevent fraudulent or undesirable practices connected with the delivery of fuel oil and odometers on automobiles. We will get into those sections later, section 28 and onwards.

Fourthly, it will streamline the enforcement with respect to short weight in prepackaged goods. That is to say, it will permit seizure and detention of goods at the factory level where there are contraventions of the act until corrective action can be taken rather than having to wait until the goods reach the retail level. The bill, as Senator Lang explained, is complementary to the consumer packaging and labelling bill which was introduced recently in the House of Commons. The provisions of the weights and measures bill will apply to all levels of trade, though it, like the companion bill, is intended above all to protect the interests of Canadian consumers. But I emphasize that the present bill is designed to ensure that in the market one gets true measure whenever one purchases by weight, by volume, by length, by area or by time.

While the packaging and labelling bill, which will come, of course, to the Senate when it has passed the House of Commons, is concerned principally with the consumer, the Weights and Measures Act and the Units of Measure Act which is combined with it are concerned with the measurement of commodities for all purposes of trade, so that no matter what someone is trading in, they can with safety rely on the fact that a pound is a pound or a yard is a yard. The bill before us makes it an offence to give short weight or measure and it provides for the proper use of scales and other measuring devices.

For example, before any type of scale or any measuring device can be used in Canada for trade, it must have been tested and approved by the Standards Branch of my Department in the laboratory we have here in Ottawa. It must be so constructed as to measure accurately and be likely to maintain its accuracy under normal use.

Finally, the bill sets forth the permissible units of measurement for trade use in Canada. It defines the basic