

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT**

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed, from Wednesday, June 27, consideration of the motion of Mr. de Cotret that Bill C-78, an Act to establish a federal environmental assessment process, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in the debate on second reading of Bill C-78 before the House today. This legislation is the cornerstone of our government's commitment to integrate the principles of sustainable development in all federal decisions.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will require the environmental assessment process to start at the beginning of the planning stage, so that decisions are made with a full knowledge of the potential environmental consequences.

Bill C-78 arises from the government's commitment to make the process more effective, fairer and more open. It reflects the main recommendations made by experts and the general public during two years of in-depth consultation.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will put Canada in the forefront of nations that seek to protect and preserve the environment. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Netherlands government, known as a leader in environmental assessment, wrote recently to congratulate the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office on its reform proposals, saying that in their opinion we had gone one step further than they had in this area. That is good news, Mr. Speaker.

The legislation will also ensure that federal authorities are accountable on environmental matters and will also increase public involvement at all stages of the assessment process. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we shall be mindful of our responsibility for administering the process efficiently. We will give environmental assessment of the impact of each project all the attention it deserves, no more and no less.

However, Mr. Speaker, this bill goes beyond providing for assessment of the potential impact of a project. Bill C-78 also requires that measures designed to protect the environment be put in place and maintained. The bill provides for follow-up and for monitoring programs. This bill will oblige us to treat the environment with respect, and that is a very good thing. But we also owe it to ourselves, our constituents and our children to see to it that the measures we are enacting be strictly tested and enforced. We will also have to keep a close watch on the evolution of projects so as to judge the effectiveness of the environmental assessment process and as a basis to assess similar projects in the future.

Mr. Speaker, a new agency—the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency—will be established to meet to the challenges inherent in this reform. Quite independent from other government organizations, the new agency will answer to and advise the Minister of Environment. It will also be responsible for implementing and managing the new assessment process within the federal administration.

With a view to concentrating our resources on projects requiring the greatest attention, Mr. Speaker, we will have three assessment approaches: mandatory studies, assessments by category, and lists of exclusions. The first, mandatory studies, relates to all projects likely to have a lasting environmental impact, such as major industrial or hydro power projects which will be the subject of very extensive environmental assessments right from the start.

The federal authority responsible for carrying out mandatory studies will scrutinize all the environmental consequences of a given project. Their report will be made public and presented to the Minister of Environment who will then decide if the project should be submitted to a mediator or a review commission. The project might also be referred to the federal authority for a final decision, but only if the Minister of Environment, enlightened by public input, is convinced that the proposition requires no further consideration.

The second approach, Mr. Speaker, will be used for many routine projects similar to other previously assessed projects, such as formation and road maintenance, to name just a few.