

*Water Resources*

private sector, and citizens generally to comment upon the bill and suggest changes they feel are necessary. We have had discussions and experienced excellent co-operation with the provinces. I feel very certain that this kind of co-operation will continue because they are as determined as we are to get at the source of this problem and do the job that is required.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, our constitution has been both a stumbling block and whipping post when we talked about questions of water. I am confident, in view of the urgency of the problem, that we can look forward to a sense of dedication and co-operation which will enable us to overcome any constitutional problems in this area. We have found in great measure, as I have said, in our discussions with the provinces this desire to overcome constitutional limitations in order that we can get on with the job. I firmly believe that whereas the constitution in the past may have been a barrier to action, under the aegis of the Canada Water Act it can be a bridge towards co-operative action and the solution of these problems.

We must also accept the fact that there is obsolete legislation, and that there have been obsolete ideas in the realm of government itself, especially with respect to questions concerning water. The obsolete ideas revolve around the concept of non-comprehensive or single use planning as well as the concept that one level of government can take sufficient action to remedy the defects.

Consequently, the Canada Water Act replaces and repeals the Canada Water Conservation Assistance Act which was based on single purpose planning and used largely to build small flood control works. For today's pressing need, that act is too rigid and narrow. Its basic concept, that the federal government was excluded from participating, except as a banker, limited the ability of the federal government to tackle the real problem.

● (4:00 p.m.)

It is encouraging to note that already we have commenced co-operative joint studies on the Okanagan and Fraser Rivers in British Columbia and that consultation on the Qu'Appelle River in Saskatchewan and the Saint John River in New Brunswick are under way. All around us there is reassuring evidence of the willingness of the provinces to co-operate and of moves in new legislative directions.

The Canada Water Act will enable the federal government to do its share.

How do we envisage that the Canada Water Act will operate? What will be the mechanics of establishing and ensuring federal-provincial co-operation; of determining priorities, of planning and implementing our plans?

We envisage ten federal-provincial joint consultative committees, one for each province. On each of these committees there will be three federal and three provincial members from high official levels. These committees will be charged with determining priorities for research data collection, planning and implementation, and they will report directly to the provincial ministers in charge of water, and to the federal Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. They will meet frequently enough to decide on what new projects or plans need be undertaken or to hear progress reports on those already under way. We must no longer allow conflicts in objectives and priorities to hinder co-operative action. These must be resolved by continuing discussions and negotiations.

Let us suppose, so that we will understand it better, that a joint consultative committee has decided to assign a high priority to a particular river basin. In all probability a joint planning board would then be established by formal agreement for that particular basin. The members of these boards might come from both the federal and provincial governments, and from the private sector as well if that would be beneficial. It would be the task of each board to draw up a series of detailed plans for the comprehensive management of the resources of that river basin, for the alleviation of problems which may have arisen and for capturing the full potential of each basin. A report from this board would also include recommendations as to cost benefits, an examination of alternatives and a plan for implementation.

The planning report would then be submitted to the appropriate governments for approval of any plans and a detailed agreement for implementation could then be signed by the appropriate governments, federal and provincial. Once such an agreement had been signed, implementation could begin, supervised either by the planning board or by a similar implementing board.

Even though the pervading spirit of the bill is co-operation, the federal government cannot avoid its ultimate responsibility to take decisive firm action when and where