

Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act

therefore be considered relevant to the final legal settlement of the claims presented by the Inuit to the government.

Another important goal which is being disputed now in northern Canada is the tendency towards decentralization of powers from the federal government to the governments of the territories. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has been encouraging for a long time the development of both governments of the territories, directing the process from the start when the north was completely dependent on Ottawa, through the establishment of legislatures in both capitals of the territories, namely Yellowknife and Whitehorse, and through the decentralization of many ministerial responsibilities in favour of the areas to which they have applied up to date and it is now considering actively other steps towards the ultimate goal of establishing responsible governments north of the 60th parallel, as soon as it is feasible, while protecting the rights of all residents of the north. While considering native claims and the decentralization of legislative powers which are crucial and complex matters, we should endeavour very cautiously not to upset the present balance. We should certainly have a specific approach to that matter of power-sharing between the federal departments which are active in the north, in order to avoid complicating matters which are already very complex.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development who is now responsible for a wide variety of social, economic and legal realities in the north, including the management and the development of resources and for negotiating any change in those realities, is heading the department which is best able to assume that role, because of the scope and variety of his experience and of his competence in dealing with problems related to matters of a very complex nature which are sometimes interrelated and conflicting. In his capacity as minister currently responsible for the government of northern Canada, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is also the most able to establish and enforce regulations and standards in those areas.

● (1650)

During the ten years since the enactment of the legislation, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has viewed the act as a tool for managing the tremendous resources contained in Arctic waters and the biological, physical and human resources that depend upon them. In co-operation with the Department of Transport and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, which share responsibility for enforcing the act and attendant regulations, the increasing uses of resources have been carefully managed as an interconnected whole. By definition, Arctic waters pollution prevention is a basic objective of that managing effort.

However, the sound managing of resources with a view to obtaining the maximum possible uses, both immediate and long term, without endangering the rights and aspirations of

northern residents, is the over-all objective, of which pollution prevention is but an aspect. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that amendments to the act could be suggested in light of the experience gained over a decade of careful and highly successful management. However, removing the responsibility for implementing the act from groups that developed it does not appear to be an appropriate change.

The skills offered by the Department of the Environment in the various aspects connected with the management and protection of the environment are unchallenged, and the assistance and advice of its officials, whose reputation is well recognized, is always invaluable. However, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development also has these skills, acquired in recognizing and meeting the unique needs for managing and protecting the exceptional Arctic environment. Those specialized skills in the disciplines connected with the environment combine with other pertinent disciplines to enable the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to face complex multidisciplinary problems. The Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act indeed covers such a question and should therefore continue under the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, as originally provided for. I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that the three members representing our great Canadian north, who already are familiar with the problem, the complexity of relations between the various groups, the people and the central government, would wish to deal with people already aware of and in the north, rather than newcomers who would have to start from scratch.

[English]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have consulted my colleagues and I understand there is agreement that private members' hour be considered as terminated at this point and that we revert to statements by ministers in a few moments, if necessary, after the ruling by Madam Speaker.

If we return to statements by ministers, I will have something to say first before the minister makes his statement.

Mr. Knowles: You should have spoken to him this morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I was told that Madam Speaker is ready to render her decision. However, if she is not ready, we will go on with private members' hour. I was told just a few moments ago that she was ready.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, I think the confusion is created by the reference made to reverting to statements by ministers. I think if we revert to routine proceedings, it will fill the bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that we revert to routine proceedings?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.