

Water Resources Programs

only real protection there could be in these areas would be to have a series of national standards so that these boards would be in a position to say that their task was to administer the standards set by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Then, they could say that the toxic content of the effluent cannot go above a certain figure. They could further say to the industry that it is its responsibility to see that the content does not go above that figure and if it does the industry will be prosecuted.

• (3:50 p.m.)

As a matter of fact I have spoken to the heads of a number of plants, particularly in British Columbia, where there is a great deal of pollution from paper mills and also from concentration plants. They say very frankly that if they knew what sort of standards the government intended to set they could begin to cope with the problem. They say that if they were to spend large amounts of money for equipment which might be found to be inadequate and had to do it all over again, this would not be the kind of market into which they would wish to buy. However, they say that if standards were set then they could begin to cope with the problem.

In my constituency, there are two mills, one of which discharges 43 million gallons of effluent a day and the other 47 million gallons of effluent a day into the bay. The effects have been disastrous. Everybody in the community is concerned. Even the companies are concerned because they know they cannot continue to do this. Some day someone will call a halt and they will be required to spend money in order to take the toxic material out of the effluent. Certainly, no local board will set the standards.

The other thing which should be apparent to the minister is that water quality management arrangements which do not cover an entire river basin or entire lake would be ineffective. We, in Ottawa, are in a very good position to judge this. What value would there be in having a set of standards on one side of the Ottawa River and a different set of standards on the other side or of having one set of standards in Ottawa and another in Hull. Unless an entire area is covered of course the fight against pollution will become an impossible task. It would be an effort of no avail to try to clean up the mouth of a river without doing anything about what is dumped into it at its source.

I rose purely for the purpose of urging the minister to consider this matter and to tell us

why it is not possible to have national standards established. I recognize that such standards would have to be flexible and that there would have to be some agency composed of scientific personnel, because if certain chemicals which had been thought to be harmless in the past were now found to be dangerous the standards would have to be changed from time to time.

I do not think anyone could argue against the fact that the only effective standards would be national standards, so that the standards would be similar all across Canada for the various types of water. I suggest to the minister that the water quality management boards will face an impossible task and that their work will prove to be ineffective unless there are national standards. If that should happen all the people who have spent so much time arousing public opinion against pollution will feel they have been let down by Parliament, and they will feel they have been let down by the minister.

Hon. J. J. Greene (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, we had several days of debate in this House during the second reading of the Canada Water bill. There have also been 36 hearings during the committee stage. Last week, two days of debate were spent on the amendments. Hopefully, we will adopt the committee report and move on to third reading. We have said that this is an important bill and members on the other side of the House have all agreed. It is for this reason that we have all, I am sure, waited patiently and eagerly for everyone to speak, often on the same point it seems. To my knowledge no one has been restricted in the deliberations or cut off from airing views. My patient friend, the hon. member for Renfrew North (Mr. Hopkins), as chairman of the committee, has conducted a very thorough examination of the bill. He gave every member an opportunity to speak on every point as often as he wished.

I believe that on every occasion in this House, when a member wished to have his time extended, he was given unanimous consent to speak longer. So, in total, to date we have had something like the following in respect of this bill. We had one day on first reading on November 5, when this important bill was first introduced. At that time, we were all cognizant of expressing our determination to get ahead with this very serious problem and to move as expeditiously as possible so that a remedy might be provided. On second reading, we had six days in this