

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 18, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

TABLING OF DRAFT BILL

Hon. Tom McMillan (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table for consultation purposes, in both official languages, a draft Bill entitled "An Act respecting the protection of human life and health and the environment", more commonly known as the "Environmental Protection Act".

A copy of the draft Bill will be sent today to all Members of the House and of the other place.

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ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

NATIVE LAND CLAIMS POLICY—STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, today I have the pleasure to announce the culmination of one of the critical initiatives undertaken by my Ministry—a comprehensive native land claims policy. I believe it represents yet another milestone in the evolving relationship between the Government and Canada's native people.

From the beginning of our mandate we recognized the vital role which Canada's native people play. Our commitment to the establishment of a relationship built upon mutual trust and confidence remains strong. Our achievements over the past 2.5 years have been many.

We live in a period of great hope for the future of the country, and I feel that our original inhabitants must play a key role in shaping it. After all, it is in the interest of all Canadians to search for and to find an amicable arrangement whereby both native and non-native communities can agree on how we will live together in Canada.

Upon assuming office the Government was faced with a comprehensive land claims policy which was out of touch. If anything, it raised obstacles to settlements rather than contributing to them. Native people were calling for change in much the same way as Canadians had voted for change. We

listened, we consulted, and today we are delivering. Now, more than ever before, we have an opportunity to complete the modern claims process in Canada through a more flexible, realistic, and responsive comprehensive land claims policy.

It has not been an easy task, and it has taken us longer to put it in place than anyone ever imagined. Still, it has been a valuable learning experience for all. It has certainly been a learning experience for me in the short six months I have spent in this office.

I am sure my predecessor, the Hon. Member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie), would agree with that statement. After all, he started the ball rolling with the appointment of a federal task force to review the whole area of comprehensive claims. At that time the Minister was convinced that the report of the task force, headed by the very capable Murray Coolican, would provide the informed, thoughtful, and independent appraisal and recommendations we have needed for some time. The Hon. Member has certainly lived up to that billing.

Over the past several months while the report was being given a public airing, we have continued to receive innumerable representations from native groups. Frankly, I have been impressed with the importance which native leaders, the provinces, the territories, and other interested Canadians have placed on the matter. In particular I should like to pay tribute to the worth-while contribution made by the Comprehensive Claims Coalition, chaired by Joanne Barnaby. This group participated in the formulation of the policy in a reasoned and reasonable way.

In the few minutes I have, I should like to outline some of the major elements of the comprehensive native land claims policy. Today I issued a policy paper and other supporting documents which explain it in more detail. First, I affirm the Government's commitment to settling comprehensive claims through negotiations on a basis which is equitable to native people and other Canadians. Also I want to announce that the federal Government stands ready to consider two alternatives to the extinguishment of aboriginal rights through claims settlements while still obtaining certainty of rights and title to the use of lands. As we all know, the language of extinguishment has long been a concern to many native people. Any other aboriginal rights which may exist will remain unaffected by comprehensive claims agreements.

A new feature of the claims policy is the provision for the enhancement of economic development and self-government—two of the Government's cornerstones in its relationship with native people. I am pleased to announce that the policy will allow for the negotiation of a broader range of self-government