

*Routine Proceedings*

The minister is preparing to proclaim the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, which would allow the federal government to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction. This act, and the related regulations, authorizes the federal government to block projects that are industrial in nature or that relate to provincial trade. Once again, the federal government has gone right ahead and meddled in someone else's area of jurisdiction. Its cavalier attitude is a sign that this new era of so-called co-operation is ultimately just so much window dressing.

When the minister points out that one of the amendments to the act is the principle of one assessment per project, she seems to be disregarding the system already in place in Quebec, which has its own environmental assessment agency. The federal government's action is all the more unacceptable because Quebec's assessment process is recognized as one of the best of its kind. It is credible, well established and has demonstrated its effectiveness.

Seven hundred and forty-five projects have gone through the assessment process since 1980. Two hundred and ninety projects are at various stages of the process and assessments are completed on twenty-five major projects a year. The reinforcement of the federal environmental assessment role will lead to dissension and conflict, sole responsibility for which will rest with the federal government, the very one who wanted to put an end to the provinces' vacillation where environmental assessment was concerned.

With no regard for the process in Quebec and the specific situation in each of the provinces, the federal government has stepped in and imposed a uniform system for all the provinces that adds nothing to what we in Quebec have been doing, with considerable success, for 15 years now. It is therefore not surprising that the minister makes no mention of the provinces' satisfaction with the new regulations being introduced.

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This duplication, I need hardly repeat, is completely unproductive. Regulations in hand, the Minister of the Environment wishes to work with each province towards harmonization. The question is whether it will be based on federal or on provincial regulations.

Even more amazing, officials from Quebec and the other provinces have been working with federal officials for a year now on a harmonization project designed to define more clearly the environmental responsibilities of the two levels of government. These discussions, which are still ongoing, deal with the environmental assessment process in particular. With this sort of attitude on the part of the federal government, harmonization is headed nowhere.

Despite the minister's apparent goodwill, the act places environmental assessment under federal jurisdiction. There will be no delegation of responsibilities to the provinces, because a federal assessment is required, even if one has been done by the province. At best, an assessment could be conducted jointly with a province, theoretically anyway, since in practice the federal government would retain final responsibility for the process. As it has the right to participate in the appointment of the chairperson and to determine the mandate of the review panel, whose reports it wants to see, the federal government has exclusive authority in this area.

There is therefore a considerable contradiction between the spirit of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. The existing equivalence agreements allow the provinces to settle certain pollution problems without the involvement of the federal government. This will not be the case here. The federal government is not interested in delegating this authority to the provinces.

The Minister of the Environment thinks that industry will be thrilled with this federal initiative. She is quite mistaken.

Last February, the director of the Centre patronal de l'environnement du Québec denounced the Environment minister's wish to make the environmental assessment process more rigorous. This group including more than 50 of Quebec's largest businesses and some 15 associations endorsed a request by the provinces to amend the federal law to provide for mutual recognition of assessments ordered by either level of government.

The Quebec industry is wary of federal legislation because it duplicates provincial legislation, which causes delays and can discourage private sector investment. So it is rather premature to maintain that the industry will applaud the federal regulations.

There is no question that the environmental impact of projects must be assessed in any society. Governments, businesses and conglomerates no longer undertake major building or development projects affecting waterways without first assessing their environmental impact. Such environmental assessments must be rigorous and methodical with a view to sustainable development.

However, the federal government's attitude toward environmental assessments suggests that confrontation with the provinces is the starting point for promulgating the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

If the new regulations to be published soon in the *Gazette officielle du Québec* reflect our apprehensions, this government has shown its usual intransigence and we can only denounce this practice.