

Water Resources Programs

the House. I urge the minister to accept the amendment so that there will be no chance in future for difficulties to arise as a result of loopholes as to jurisdiction between the provinces and the federal government. I am referring to loopholes in bills that pertain to pollution. It seems to me that the amendment is straightforward. It will certainly help to tighten the act, and we shall have better legislation as a result. Unquestionably, we need to tighten the various pieces of legislation dealing with our pollution problems.

The hon. member who has just spoken has indicated that this amendment will assign to the federal Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene) those powers which are not now exclusively assigned to the legislatures of the provinces or to any other department, branch or agency of the government relating to the control and management of the water resources of Canada and to the preservation, improvement and restoration of the quality of the national environment by the prevention, elimination and limitation of the pollution of water resources and the pollution of any natural element that in any way might or does pollute a water resource.

What is wrong with putting this in the legislation? Far too often have our provincial and federal governments passed legislation containing all kinds of loopholes, and as a consequence when a conflict has arisen, perhaps over some small issue, there are lengthy delays. Then, we find both the federal and provincial authorities hiding behind the constitution and telling the people of the nation, "We cannot take action for the simple reason that the legislation is not clear." All we are asking is that the government take a look at this clause. I would not hesitate to make any changes in the wording which might be thought necessary to comply with legalistic points which might be raised on the government side. To me, the amendment makes sense. Why should we leave a vacuum in any of this legislation? Let us plug loopholes now, and prevent lengthy delays in the future when dealing with these problems. Canada is faced today with pollution dangers which were never anticipated a few years ago and as time goes on we shall no doubt be faced with new types of pollution which threaten to contaminate our environment; a stage will be reached at which it will not be possible to tolerate lengthy delays.

[Mr. Harding.]

• (3:50 p.m.)

For these reasons I urge the government to incorporate the amendment in the bill because it will provide extra protection which we certainly need.

[Translation]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I should simply like to say a few words in connection with this amendment, so as to encourage the minister to support it, for I think Bill C-144 can only be improved by it.

I suggest the government should grasp this opportunity and improve this piece of legislation, because, as it stands now, some levels of government would find no teeth in it.

The various governments do legislate now on Canadian waters and it is not known which one has the prime responsibility. It is not known either which level of government should take the first steps in this or that area to control or to ward off water pollution.

I am in favour of the amendment moved by the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau), and I believe it fits in very well with the subject being discussed at this time. If we want Bill C-144 to benefit all Canadians, I think we must pass this amendment straight off.

[English]

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise to support this amendment which is similar to several others which were before us during committee stage. It is also similar to an amendment of mine which will not be debated today.

In spite of all the bits and pieces of legislation which have been placed before Parliament this session on this general subject, the lack of consultation with provincial authorities and the apparent lack of consultation between federal departments prior to the introduction of bills purporting to control pollution leaves me convinced that there is no guiding hand, or central direction toward a national pollution control policy. I fear that when this bill is passed there will be an overlapping of responsibilities, that we shall find two or three federal departments responsible for the same job, and, what is worse, that there will be large gaps, areas in which nobody will be responsible for taking action. Control of pollution is such a tremendously important matter that there must be someone charged with co-ordinating the whole effort.

It has been suggested that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene) is