

Government Orders

I am especially pleased to inform the House that these new acts will allow the federal government and the territorial water boards to take a much stronger stance on environmental issues than in the past. For example, they provide explicit authority for the water boards to address closure and abandonment of licensed operations. As well, the inspection and enforcement provisions of the legislation have been strengthened. Inspectors will be able to enforce licence conditions by issuing stop work and clean-up orders where there is danger to persons or to the environment. All licence conditions will be enforceable.

Under the proposed amendments, the list of potential offences has also been broadened. For example, these bills will make it an offence to violate any licence conditions or to fail to report a deposit of waste and penalties have been expanded and modernized. The new bills increase the maximum fines for major licensees from \$5,000 to \$100,000 and for minor users the increase will be from \$5,000 to \$15,000. The bills also introduce the possibility of jail terms.

Finally, in relation to the environment, Bills C-51 and C-52 confirm that the territorial water boards can set water quality conditions that are more stringent than those set out even under the Fisheries Act.

Hon. members should also be aware that the new legislation provides for compensation to be paid to anyone who suffers losses as a result of a water use. As I mentioned earlier, this provision includes domestic and instream users.

The provisions of the legislation relating to security deposits have also been strengthened and clarified. Under the proposed amendments, such deposits may be used to guarantee compliance with licence conditions, to remedy violations or to pay court ordered compensation.

The remaining amendments contained in Bills C-51 and C-52 are minor and essentially administrative in nature.

I want to reiterate that these proposals are for the most part supported by all key stakeholders in the north. They were developed after extensive consultations. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has taken special care to ensure that the Yukon Waters Act and the Northwest Territories Waters Act respect the interests of northern natives. In this regard, we are

particularly pleased with the environmental stewardship components of the legislation. The amendments that clarify instream uses of water and compensation for damages are also extremely important to aboriginal people.

It has been suggested that changes to the administration system for water management should be postponed until the major land claims in the north are resolved. We cannot agree with that approach. Changes to the Northern Inland Waters Act are long overdue and have been in the works for a number of years. The amendments we are proposing will result in improved legislation for water management regimes that are established under claims settlements. Where there are inconsistencies between future claims settlement agreements and this water management legislation, the claims settlement legislation will take precedence.

In closing, I would like to remind members that these amendments are fully in keeping with the government's policy on northern political development. They provide for decision-making to be moved closer to the people and they will facilitate the eventual transfer of legislative responsibility for water management to the territorial governments.

As well, the amendments address our commitment under the Arctic environmental strategy, the green plan, and will enhance our ability to protect the northern environment.

Finally, by streamlining administrative arrangements we will encourage sustainable, environmentally responsible economic development. This will translate into jobs for northerners and increased economic prosperity for all of Canada.

In short, this is an excellent example of a situation where everyone wins. I urge hon. members to join with the many other Canadians who support these legislative amendments.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my remarks will be brief on this bill. As you know, our community has had a very active campaign going to bring to people's attention the importance of the management of our water resources in this country. I too would like to support the government in bringing this legislation up to date.