

Metric System

serve as guidelines for each member company or organization in a given sector. The patterns emerging so far in Canada and, for example, in Australia, indicate that the bulk of a given sector does convert on or around the dates in its sector plan. The important aspect as far as we are concerned in this House is that the federal government should also have a timetable indicating when legislation ought to be passed, because the time when legislation is required is clearly marked for each sector in the sector plans. It is thanks to this careful planning that we have developed a schedule of dates which covers the majority of the 90 federal measurement-sensitive acts needing amendment. The bill before us today is the first of four such bills to be proposed before the virtual completion of the final or implementation phase of metric conversion. It covers nine of the 90 acts.

I propose to deal briefly with the main features of the bill before us, first being the proposals relating to the grains sector. The most pressing deadline we face concerns the various pieces of legislation which must be changed to allow the bulk grain handling industry to go fully metric in February of next year. Domestic and export futures transactions have been made in metric tonnes since July of this year on the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange Futures Market. The conversion of scales has already begun. The Manitoba Pool, the Saskatchewan Pool, the Alberta Pool, the United Grain Growers, the National Farmers Union, and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture all support conversion. With this kind of support, with widespread conversion work already completed, and with our customers abroad, even in the U.S.A., already using metric units, it would be far more costly to undo the work already done than to make sure this bill is passed in time. The proposals with regard to grain involve four of the nine acts covered by the bill.

I wish to deal briefly with the reference to the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act. Many metric conversion managers across the country have noted that when both metric and imperial units appear side by side on a consumer product, the consumer tends to notice only the familiar unit and ignore the new one. As experience in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, testifies, the result is that the consumer learns nothing about the new system. Many sector committees, with the support of industry, have recommended that the legal requirement to show the customary Canadian unit be dropped. The amendment is to the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act and would mean that the manufacturer would have the option to show the old unit or not. This amendment would thus favourably affect all sectors manufacturing consumer packaged goods, not to mention all wholesalers, retailers, and the consumers themselves.

● (2110)

The Weights and Measures Act will also be amended. The sixth act that would be amended by this bill now stipulates that the governor in council cannot amend it in such a way as to prevent the use of customary Canadian measures in trade. Given the over-all policy in the White Paper acclaimed in 1970 of the eventual adoption of a single coherent measurement

system, the proposed amendment to the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act, and taking note of the accelerating pace of introduction of metric products, it is now time to delete this provision.

This amendment could affect the advertising and sale of commodities sold by weight, volume, or length, and prevent consumer confusion about the quantity of a product by controlling the unit of measurement.

There are other important acts that will also be amended. Another clause of the bill would amend the Regional Development Incentives Act by changing square miles to square kilometres. This is merely an arithmetical change to specify the size of a designated area as 12,500 square kilometres instead of 5,000 square miles.

In the natural gas distribution sector no change can be made to provincial legislation governing the transmission and distribution of natural gas until the Federal Gas Inspection Act is changed. In the metric conversion plan of this sector this amendment is therefore critical. The plan also calls for drilling to begin in July, 1978, with a lead time of one year for legislation, and this bill would amend the Oil and Gas Production and Conservation Act in time.

May I briefly point out that it is not only the 1,500 volunteers from the Canadian private sector who have been looking to the federal government for leadership in metric conversion. The provincial governments and the United States are vitally interested in every move this House makes in connection with metric conversion.

In 1974 all ten premiers sent a letter to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) expressing their support for the program of guideline dates for metric conversion. Omnibus bills have already been passed in provincial legislatures; the first was in British Columbia in June, 1974, and the second in Alberta on November 4 of this year. All provincial governments have organizations which co-ordinate metric conversion, and in most cases they have been operating for several years now. Metric conversion activity among the provincial governments is, therefore, well under way. Unless this House keeps up the pace with its own legislation, provincial legislatures will be inhibited from acting on their own legislation, as in the case of the Federal Gas Inspection Act.

Since May, 1973, the United States has been actively investigating, planning, and scheduling metric conversion for the private sector on a national basis. The national sector and co-ordinating committees of the American National Metric Council, formed since that time, have been operating along much the same lines as the Metric Commission national committee structure.

Contrary to some belief, the United States is doing more than just following Canada. It can be said that the United States is moving very quickly in some influential sectors of the American economy. For example, 40 per cent of all components in General Motors automobiles are now in metric dimensions. The Ford plant in Lima, Ohio, has been producing all metric engines since 1973. The essentially all metric General