

Hydro Development

convinced that the federal government is not selling out B.C.'s salmon resources to B.C. Hydro.

Let us look at the facts without all the wild speculation and allegations. The first point to be made is that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans adheres to a long-standing policy to work positively at the watershed level with other water users when it can be demonstrated that fisheries goals can be accommodated. The department's main responsibility is, of course, to protect and, wherever possible, enhance the fish stocks. Where this can be achieved in concert with some industrial development, whether a hydro dam or whatever, then departmental officials will work toward this end.

Some time ago departmental officials put forward an idea, and I stress an idea, in a discussion paper in which they visualized the possibility in certain circumstances of fish enhancement facilities amalgamated with low-head hydro dams, with the suggestion that such developments might be financed on a shared-cost basis. It was an idea put forward purely for discussion purposes so that the practicalities and the pros and cons could be considered in the broader context of salmon enhancement. There is nothing sinister about that. This kind of procedure happens all the time in government.

However, I should make it quite clear, particularly for the benefit of the hon. member for Skeena, that at this time potential projects combining fish enhancement and power generation have not been identified anywhere in B.C. I cannot say that the concept is dead. It remains in the development stage within the department and might well receive further consideration at some future date.

I believe that, in situations where there is no harm to salmon enhancement and where the benefits of salmon enhancement can be increased by the installation of a low-head dam, a serious look should be taken at that possibility by everyone, including all department officials.

Let me also remind hon. members that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has itself entered into the dam building business in areas where river or stream flow control is known to be a critical factor for fish. Such dams have proven highly successful in regulating water discharge for optimum fish production. To cite an example, this technique has been used in the Fulton River—maybe it was named after the hon. member—where a dam built by the department permits regulated water supplies to salmon spawning channels, and also in the Big Qualicum area to supply a spawning channel and hatchery complex.

These projects are both very successful fish producers which could not have been accomplished without dams providing controlled flow in the system. The point to be made here is that dams per se are not necessarily bad medicine as far as fish production is concerned. They can, and have been, used positively as a fish enhancement tool with good results.

At the same time I must also make it clear that the department remains committed to the natural production of fish, whenever and wherever possible, and to proper habitat protection measures.

High-head hydro dams can destroy salmon runs, in that they may present an impassable barrier to fish migrating upstream or downstream, as well as creating unnatural flow conditions which fundamentally change the aquatic environment in the area of the dam. It is the considered opinion of departmental experts that the various methods that have been tried to transport fish around such dams are not sufficiently successful to compensate for the numbers of fish that are frustrated in their migration patterns by the barrier. For this reason the department recognizes that fish, and large high-head hydro projects are essentially incompatible.

If I might enlarge a little on this subject, the Iskut-Stikine power project is a case in which B.C. Hydro is proposing a number of high dams capable of generating 2,765 megawatts of electricity, which could make it one of the largest power generators in the province. Considering that the Iskut-Stikine River system produces tens of thousands of salmon, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is naturally concerned about the environmental impact of such a project. Although the dams could be constructed above what is thought to be the natural upstream limit of migrating salmon, B.C. Hydro, with departmental input, has spent in the order of \$1.25 million to \$1.5 million over the past few years in biological studies alone to determine the downstream impact of the construction of the dams. Here again let me make the point very clear and unequivocal that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has no intention of approving a project which is likely to result in an unacceptable loss to the fisheries resource.

Turning to the wider question of the federal government's action and initiatives with regard to the west coast fisheries, I can confidently claim that the government's record is not one that we need be ashamed of. Rather, quite the contrary. I can point to a number of examples in support of this claim. The most obvious, perhaps, is the salmonid enhancement program, a federal-provincial project under which the federal government has undertaken to invest some \$150 million over seven years with the objective of doubling the production of salmon and sea-run trout in British Columbia by the end of the next decade.

Back in 1975 when the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans first announced the salmonid enhancement program, he described it as "a bold and imaginative approach to the long-cherished dream of expanding our salmon resources". That was a very apt description because it has taken a considerable amount of boldness and more than a little imagination to plan and implement this major program, which involves the use of various enhancement techniques, including artificial spawning channels, hatcheries, fishways, lake fertilization and so forth.

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It is now in its fifth year. The salmonid enhancement program is showing increasingly positive results in the number of salmon being produced through its various facilities throughout British Columbia. Last fall some 563 million eggs were obtained from the five species of salmon at SEP facilities.