

Government Orders

mental assessments mandatory for all projects under federal jurisdiction.

One of the provisions of Bill C-78, clause 6(1)(a), states that an environmental assessment of a project is not required where, and I quote:

—in the opinion of the responsible authority the project is described in an exclusion list;

This grants additional powers to a minister, making the opinion of the minister weightier than that which is written in the act.

In clauses 21 and 24 we find the discretionary powers of responsible authorities and ministers outlined. These discretionary powers include the ability to terminate an assessment. That is unacceptable to us.

In clause 34 we find that the authority responsible for the project, such as a minister, is the one required to act on the report of any review and makes the decision to allow the project to proceed or to stop it. Such a requirement leaves the minister vulnerable to intense lobbying from those who wish to see a project go ahead, regardless of the environmental costs and consequences.

A bill that grants such discretion and allows for endless exclusions is clearly one without teeth. What we need now and what we needed years ago, is legislation with teeth, something that will make things happen. The Tories promised this legislation in 1984. It was going to be, in their own words, tough. Perhaps they overlooked their promise to deal seriously with this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the report card on this bill, as we have said, is negative, it is zero, zilch, and no good.

• (1320)

Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to be standing before the House this afternoon speaking to Bill C-78 which is an act to establish a federal environmental assessment process.

The purpose of this bill is to create binding legislation to ensure that environmental assessments are carried out on certain projects within federal jurisdiction. It would replace the federal policy on environmental assess-

ment and review known as the guidelines order in effect since June, 1984.

Canadians need some sense of confidence that the environment is going to be protected. They are looking for a more considered, sensitive process. This bill is one that gives us something to discuss and to move ahead with because it is badly needed.

Unfortunately, the weakness of the legislation before us makes for a skeptical public and questions the motives of us as legislators and the seriousness of the government's intent in enacting this resolution.

The credibility of the bill would be considerably enhanced if the concept of sustainable development would find its way into the preamble and the purposes. It would be considerably more enhanced if this reference to a balance between the economy and the environment were referred to. This is significant because the over-riding purpose of this legislation should be to foster sustainable development.

It has been said that the 1980s will be remembered as the decade that the earth spoke back. It seems that we cannot pick up a newspaper these days without reading stories about problems in our environment. Think about it: acid rain, smog, dirty water, closed beaches, and global warming. Today human kind is seriously reassessing the relationship with the natural world. We have become aware that in our enthusiasm for economic development we have neglected a crucial component of what allows our economy to support us, the environment. We have been living off the capital we have inherited, not the interest and it has to stop.

Most people want to do the right thing when it comes to our environment. Many of us still have a basic lack of understanding of what we can do to relate to the environment. We hesitate to call ourselves environmentalists, but we do not want to be labelled insensitive. What we do know, all of us, is that the problem is urgent and the time for change is now. And changing we are. With increasing awareness of environmental issues, comes a burning desire to save this planet earth which is the source of our existence. Along with fears and new awareness comes inspiration and dedication. I would like to challenge all of us to let us make 1991 the year that we answer back.