

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 6, 1970

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

POLLUTION

STATEMENT ON PHOSPHATE CONTROL

Hon. J. J. Greene (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, the question of the control of phosphate nutrients as an essential step toward the cleaning of polluted waters is one in which this House and the public generally have recently demonstrated great concern.

The report of the pollution reference board on the lower Great Lakes to the International Joint Commission has recently highlighted the most critical aspects of the problem with respect to Lakes Erie and Ontario.

In view of the undoubted seriousness of the problem, my department has been active in looking further into potential solutions to the problem of eutrophication caused in some considerable part by the use of phosphates in Canada.

Shortly after the report of the reference board to the IJC was published, I held discussions with my United States counterpart, Secretary Hickel, and informed him of our point of view on the need for joint action. In addition, senior officials from my department specifically discussed the phosphate problem on the Great Lakes with senior officials of the Department of the Interior of the United States. Other officials from governments in Canada and the United States were sent to Sweden to investigate the phosphate control program in that country and still others were dispatched to discuss research and development of phosphate alternatives with a major United States detergent producer. Furthermore, I held discussions with industry representatives to hear their point of view and to inform them of the gravity with which we viewed the problem, and to determine whether action and self-discipline on their part on a voluntary basis could be the successful approach to the problem.

With respect to the Great Lakes, it clearly appeared that there was little point in Canada acting alone, since most of the phosphates entering those waters emanated from the United States. United States action, as well as Canadian, was therefore essential if any real solution to the question was to be achieved, and if Canadian action to ban or control was to be anything more than an empty gesture.

I am, therefore, most pleased to report to the House that on February 4 at hearings in Rochester the U.S. federal water pollution control administration took a fresh look at its position and is now calling for the reduction of phosphates in detergents as recommended in the report to the IJC. The U.S. federal water pollution control administration have asserted their willingness to control phosphates within minimum practicable levels immediately and to look to the complete replacement of phosphates as soon as possible.

My department supports the recommendations to the IJC concerning phosphate control and looks forward to the commission's report to the governments of Canada and the United States.

• (11:10 a.m.)

I have instructed my department to work in close conjunction with the United States federal water pollution control administration to attempt to achieve a co-ordinated plan of control and an imminent complete replacement of phosphates. I shall be consulting with my counterpart ministers in the provinces to attempt to achieve a plan of control and ultimate replacement of phosphates that is mutually acceptable and which will thus have the support of any provincial action required under our constitution.

I have further instructed my departmental officials to advise the IJC, at their public hearing today in Brockville, of our intention to act on this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis-Roland Comeau (South Western Nova): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that intelligent comments are impossible, as we received the release only two minutes before coming to the House.