

Northern Inland Waters Bill

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Speaker, I have no objection to the minister asking a question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the minister wants to ask the hon. member a question, that is all right.

Mr. Chrétien: I can ask it in the form of a question. Is the hon. member aware that on the question of the land and other resources in the north my department has formed a tripartite committee with people representing the conservationist interest, another group representing the mining interest or the oil interest, and the department, all working together to analyse these problems?

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of all the details of the activities that the minister has in the north, but certainly the point he has made is not one with which I would quarrel. This is really bulwarking the argument I am attempting to present, that when these various committees, advisory committees, tripartite committees, or what-have-you are working we should have some kind of yardstick by which they can go. For instance, how are they to know what is the proper quality of water management for a given purpose?

I have had discussions with the minister's colleague, both formal and informal, with respect to the act that is to apply generally across Canada. And his colleague, erroneously I think, assumes if you are talking about pollution standards you are talking about something that is fixed and rigid in every circumstance across the country. This means that the quality of water in Hamilton harbour would have to be the same as the quality of water in Lake Louise. This is obviously nonsense, and nobody is suggesting anything like that.

All I am saying is that we are developing all these various management areas but we are not setting up any kind of independent machinery to keep them all pulling together instead of pulling and pushing in different directions. Whether one is talking about dog teams or horse teams, it is usually useful to have them all pulling in the same direction. In my view this is one of the deficiencies in this bill, as it is in the other one, that there is no provision made for that kind of thing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose there is no point in my pursuing this matter because it is very much the subject of discussion in connection with the other bill in the name of the

This is the whole point. The average Canadian citizen may not be able to understand all the complicated chemistry that is involved, but the average Canadian citizen is becoming increasingly knowledgeable on these matters. Most people you talk to now have some idea what you are talking about if you mention the ecology of the north, to use the words the minister used in his speech. I know that in my area people who are teachers of the biological and chemical science courses in the secondary schools are taking an interest in examining and discussing these questions. These kinds of people, as well as the general citizens, should have something to which they can go to determine whether or not the water quality management board in their area, whether it is in a territory or part of a whole province, is adopting acceptable standards.

I suppose, Mr. Speaker, it would be a case of the tail wagging the dog if we were to spell out in the bill the kind of standards which should, in the opinion of Parliament, be acceptable all across Canada. I would like to come back, Mr. Speaker, to the suggestion I made in the House before, that what we need is an independent body somewhere. I made a suggestion, when I spoke on this several years ago, that this independent body should be set up and work in close connection with the National Research Council, in much the same way that our building standards code is constantly up-graded according to the findings of the research division of the National Research Council.

Apparently, the thinking of many people in the present government is against that approach, but I think that sooner or later experience is going to demonstrate the need for that kind of independent, forward-looking body. Then, the citizens of this country, whether they are in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia or Newfoundland can judge the performance of the various boards that may be managing the water areas in their part of the country.

Mr. Chrétien: If the hon. member would permit me to make a remark, I would like to say there was that kind of yardstick—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that this procedure is a little unorthodox. We are not in committee of the whole. Much as the exchange between the minister and the hon. member for Comox-Alberni is interesting, we might avoid this until we get to committee stage.