

Official celebration of the reopening of Bieudron, the 60th anniversary of Grande Dixence SA, and the inauguration of a new information pavilion and visitors' tour through the Nendaz and Bieudron power stations, 30.04 2010

Speech by Jean-Michel Cina, Head of the Department of the Economy, Energy and Territory of the Canton of Valais

Only the actual words spoken shall be deemed authentic.

Chairman of Grande Dixence and Chairman of Alpiq,
Vice-Chairman of Grande Dixence and Chairman of AES,
Directors,
Representatives of the federal, cantonal and municipal authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen, our guests,

As Head of the Valais Department of Energy, it is a great honour for me to be able to participate in this ceremony today. In fact, this day of celebration is, on three accounts, an important occasion for our canton.

Celebrating the 60th anniversary of a company is always a pleasure, but celebrating that of a company such as Grande Dixence SA, which, as my fellow citizens and I well know, forms an integral part of our canton's historical identity, is particularly symbolic. I am especially happy today to be able to celebrate at the same time the inauguration and enhancement of a place imbued with the essence of this company, which is open to the public and is a place of reappropriation so to speak.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today we are attending together the reopening of Bieudron. The 12 December 2000 will remain a day of sadness in the history of our canton, a dark episode in the use of hydraulic power in Valais. The human and material loss caused when a high-pressure water pipe burst and destroyed part of the reinforced shaft of the Cleuson-Dixence hydropower facility is engraved on our memories and we wish to pay our respects once again to the victims of this tragedy.

However, since then, the external traces have been erased and the region transformed and rehabilitated. The reconstruction project has developed rapidly, accompanied throughout by our departments and by the municipalities and federal authorities affected. Here we are today at the end of years of work, efforts made and great attention paid to each detail. The result is a sign of hope and a truly new beginning.

On a wider scale, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are also witnessing a truly new beginning for hydraulic power. We need think only of the "Nant de Drance" pumped storage hydroelectricity project conducted mainly by Alpiq, or of other large-scale projects on the Rhône that are under consideration or in the planning stage, such as the Rhôdix project, or those of Massongex-Bex, Lavey plus and Gletsch Oberwald. Not forgetting of course the small hydraulic power stations, whose projects are

flourishing. All of this can only be good news for an energy whose quantitative and qualitative potential no longer needs to be proven.

However, use of this energy also has a number of conditions and obligations attached.

The 1991 federal water protection act stipulates that watercourses that are harnessed must be decontaminated. We are working on measures to achieve this, which must be completed by 2012.

It is also on this account that the Conference of the Alpine Cantons has supported the indirect counter-proposal to the extreme "Living Water" popular initiative.

Lastly, the return of water concessions is a subject of high importance for our canton. In fact, even though they only expire in approximately 30 years time, the insertion of a new article into the federal law on the use of hydraulic power will authorise early renewal of a concession.

Therefore, we must consider this issue in good time and in a comprehensive way and think in detail about the resulting challenges. It is obvious that in future, Valais should consider the production and sale of electricity produced from hydraulic power as one of the principal pillars of its economy. We must also give ourselves the means to achieve this by having a clear policy and strategy. We are working on it!

Let us once again pay homage to this sexagenarian, still in the prime of youth, and enjoy the celebrations!