

# Scientist studying Great Whale gives Ottawa a damage report

TERRANCE WILLS  
GAZETTE OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA — The federal scientist who was prevented from testifying before the New York hearing on the Great Whale hydro project got a chance yesterday to voice his environmental concerns before a Parliamentary committee.

John Rudd is conducting a ground-breaking study into the amount of methane gas and carbon dioxide produced by hydro reservoirs created by flooding forests and wetlands around James Bay and Hudson Bay.

Submerged decaying vegetation could yield even more environmentally damaging gases than would be given off by coal-burning hydro plants generating the same amount of electricity, Rudd told the Commons energy committee.

Rudd urged Hydro-Québec to await the preliminary results of his study some three years off before proceeding with the \$12.6 billion Great Whale project now scheduled to begin in the spring of 1993.

"I don't make policy. I just do the research. But it's not a long time to

wait," said Rudd, a Department of Fisheries and Oceans research scientist who is heading the 15-member study at the Winnipeg-based Freshwater Institute.

Great Whale would create reservoirs covering 4,400 square kilometres of land, an area almost as big as Prince Edward Island.

Rudd was invited to testify at the hearings which led to the New York State Power Authority delaying until next fall its decision whether to buy \$17 billion worth of power from the project. But the federal government refused to give him clearance.

After the New York authority and Hydro-Québec announced the one-year delay in August, Premier Robert Bourassa said Great Whale will go ahead regardless.

Conservative MPs at the committee hearing yesterday stressed that Rudd's findings were a hypothesis yet to be proven. Rudd agreed but pointed out that other scientific experts had rigorously examined his early findings before he was granted funding for the project, which also involves U.S. scientists.

And another expert witness yes-

terday backed up Rudd's hypothesis.

"He's completely and wholeheartedly supported by my colleagues working in this area," Peter Sly, science director of the Rawson Academy of Aquatic Science, told the committee.

Both Rudd and Sly were warned of increased mercury levels from Great Whale, as occurred with James Bay I.

"The scientific community now is generally of the opinion that the fish in the reservoir built in this area (Great Whale) will be mercury contaminated for several decades, often above marketable limits," Rudd said.

"I'd be very concerned," Sly said. He also warned of the likelihood of shore erosion around the reservoir which "could create a desert in the drawdown areas."

Sly said his institute has proposed to Ottawa and to Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, that it conduct a full-scale environmental study in the lands draining into James Bay and Hudson Bay.

The institute is still awaiting replies, he said.