

# Federal official questions Hydro's environmental record

THE GAZETTE

MONTPELIER, Vt. — Hydro-Québec cannot be allowed to continue damming up northern Quebec without a public review of the environmental impacts, a federal environment official said yesterday.

David Cliche, co-ordinator of James Bay affairs for the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office, said Quebecers have been told in the past their provincially owned utility is "clean, clean, clean."

"Hydro-Québec is not clean, clean, clean. I'm sorry," he said.

Quebecers face a decision: "Do we keep damming our rivers or not?" he said.

"The decision to be taken is between the environment and exporting electricity for money."

Cliche, who ran for the Parti Québécois in last year's provincial election, but lost, was attending hearings here on a proposed Hydro-Québec export to Vermont.

He is worried that if Hydro signs a lot of export contracts, the environmental review of future Hydro dams could be compromised, he said.

"The only concern I have is Hydro-Québec signing an export deal which

puts a lot of pressure to get a project going to meet the export (demands)," he said.

"It pressures our environmental assessment process, and a sound process with public hearings is not to be pressured."

He said Ottawa will begin its own environmental review of Hydro-Québec's Great Whale project if an agreement for a joint review with Quebec is not reached by March.

But negotiations with Quebec have been promising and both sides agree that there must be public hearings on the project, he added.

A stumbling block has been per-

suading the Cree to accept a joint process, he said.

Alan Penn, a scientist for the Cree Regional Authority who was also in Montpelier for the hearings, said the Cree want to be sure the environmental review is not a whitewash.

But they have an interest in agreeing to some sort of review process with Quebec and Ottawa, he said.

"If they don't, they'll be left out." Hydro-Québec has said it wants to start construction on the Great Whale project next year, but Penn said a serious environmental review could take up to five years.

— Graeme Hamilton