

## **FLASH SHEET #5**

### **Gracia Janes Environment Convener February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003**

As global warming issues heat up and alternatives to traditional sources are coming to the fore, we must be cautious that the seemingly simple solutions of “clean” nuclear, or mega-dams, on the supply side, do not forge ahead to the detriment of the environment.

#### **NUCLEAR POWER**

Almost daily we are inundated with nuclear industry ads in magazines, newspapers and on the internet, touting the benefits of this very dangerous energy source as a way to cut greenhouse gases and meet our Kyoto targets without pain. This is despite the fact that one would have to see a doubling of current nuclear stations world-wide to reduce the global greenhouse gases by 5% .

It also ignores the very real risks we face in jurisdictions that rely heavily on nuclear power. For instance, in Ontario older plants such as Pickering are nearing the end of their life span, and were shut down for safety reasons in 1997. Although the Pickering nuclear plants are being upgraded, serious concerns have been raised recently by the federal watchdog, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, about the restart plans to take place over the next few years. Their fears are justified, given the plants' safety records and, according to a February 28<sup>th</sup> article in the Toronto Star newspaper, the paucity of information ( three lines) in its current application for an eight year licence, about how “as many as 20,000 people could be warned to evacuate the area in the event of a serious accident.”

There are also concerns being expressed about the Bruce A reactors, which until just a few months ago were run by privately owned British Energy, a company which has been the subject of serious concerns by the British Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, for “losing managerial control at times, by contracting out , and in some areas sacrificing safety due to an emphasis on output”. British Energy has replaced the Bruce plant's aging fuel channels selectively, rather than completely, hence, as NCWC President Catharine Laidlaw Sly warned the Prime Minister this fall, “setting the stage for a possible repeat of the dangerous and potentially catastrophic pressure tube breaks at Pickering in 1983 and 1986.” President Laidlaw- Sly also noted our “grave” concerns with Ontario's “continued reliance on these aging CANDU reactors” , which is very much”to the detriment of increasing substantively the use of alternative sources of energy.

These are the kinds of dangers that have prevented any new plants being built in the USA since 1973. And yet Canada , through Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, continues to subsidize the CANDU technology around the world. For example, according to a January 9<sup>th</sup> Toronto Star article “ Let's stop financing risky Candu loans” , a 1996 AECL deal saw the Government of Canada loaning China \$1.5 billion to take 2 CANDU reactors. AECL is headed for a review by the Federal Government sometime soon. Let's hope the newly revived interest in nuclear plants as the magic solution to greenhouse gases does not gain momentum in Canada or elsewhere and get in the way of a thorough reevaluation of their dangers as an energy source!

#### **RUPERT RIVER DIVERSION /CHURCHILL FALLS MEGA- HYDRO PROJECTS**

Quebec and Newfoundland/Labrador governments are also planning and promoting mega hydro dams as the way of the future. Having lost the battle to pursue the environmentally devastating

Great Whale/Grand Baleine project ten years ago, the Government of Quebec, through Hydro Quebec, is forging ahead with a new project that will, according to an August 5<sup>th</sup> report on Radio Netherlands, dam

and radically reduce the size and volume of the Rupert river, which is “truly one of the last great virgin rivers in North America.” Hydro Quebec plans to construct at least 4 dams and about 51 dykes, in order to divert much of the river northwards to a massive hydro electric reserve. Opponents estimate that the project will flood 1,000 square kilometres of old growth boreal forest; impact 165 lakes and 5 rivers; drain 555 kilometres of the Rupert River; eliminate the habitat of one of the continents last remaining populations of brook trout, and that of the unusual fresh water shrimps; and would disrupt the sanctuaries of many bird species, including one of the last eastern North American refuges for the Golden Eagle.

That the Government of Quebec and Quebec Hydro is moving ahead with plans quickly, is mainly due to its having persuaded a slim majority of the Cree Nation to buy into the plan. Some have since said that they voted for the project based on an understanding that it would be the last such mega-dam in the north. This appears not to be the case, as Hydro Quebec is now offering a \$475 million deal to the Inuit of northern Quebec to study hydro electric development on their lands- lands which have no roads of dams. And, in Newfoundland, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has made a preliminary agreement with the Inuit to begin a series of dams in the Arctic, starting in 2004.

In all these projects, the native peoples have been offered jobs, significant funding, and in the case of the Rupert River project, some control over the project. These immediate gains are very hard for the Cree and the Inuit to turn down, given the significant hardships they have endured for many years. But there is opposition, such as many of the Cree who voted against the Rupert River proposal and a group called the Rupert Reverence, a coalition of Crees and Northern Quebecois. They find it difficult to understand why many of the same people who fought against the Grande Baleine project, because it would be so very detrimental to the fragile northern environment, would now turn their backs on their native “reverence for the land”.

This battle for the northern lands of Canada has just begun. While an environmental assessment is not required for the first stage of the massive Rupert River project, the second stage, involving the diversion of 92% of the river’s water will be subject to a joint federal/provincial environmental assessment. Let us hope that the government will act wisely on this and that the environment will come first!

Twelve years ago NCWC policy urged the Government of Canada to “**ensure that a complete joint environmental assessment is done on the entire James Bay 11 (Grand Baleine) hydro project... and that if the environmental assessment shows there will be an unfavourable impact, that the project is cancelled forthwith.**” An update of NCWC policy is coming forward to the Annual meeting for a vote. It will propose that we urge the government of Canada to “**discourage all mega-dam hydro projects, and support instead the use of energy conservation and alternative forms of energy for hydro needs b) ensure that all such mega-hydro project proposals be subject to full intervener-funded environmental assessments, and c) exert the right to cancel such projects, should the environmental assessment show that they will have a damaging environmental consequences, immediately or in the future.**” I will keep you posted on any relevant information in the days ahead of the Annual Meeting!