● (2220)

The government of Alberta, which has the primary responsibility for the control of air emissions from the Syncrude plant, has worked and continues to work in close co-operation with the department in ensuring an adequate and realistic assessment of the potential environmental impact of the project and the best means of effecting the controls found to be necessary.

The former minister tabled in the House in November, 1974, the department's review of the environmental assessment prepared by Syncrude for the Alberta Ministry of the Environment. I should note that the government of Alberta requested our review of the report, and this was in keeping with the spirit of co-operation that exists between the two governments in environmental matters. Both governments, not surprisingly, found the report deficient in a number of areas. A project of this magnitude using new processes has potential effects on all facets of the environment, and the preparation of an environmental assessment that will satisfy all questions posed by the scientific and technical community and the public is probably an unreachable goal, but is a goal that we will continue to strive for.

The department now has in operation an environmental assessment and review process to deal with major projects such as this involving government financing. The process is designed to avoid duplication of effort by utilizing assessments that may have been initiated by provincial governments, as is the case with Syncrude, where federal financial involvement was announced earlier this year.

We have taken steps to plug the gaps in scientific knowledge revealed by our review, with regard to the potential impact on the environment in the tar sands area. The $40 million joint program with the government of Alberta referred to earlier in the House is largely devoted to this task. However, by their very nature, such scientific studies require time. Even with such research completed, when one considers the complexities of ecological systems, we will still have uncertainties. It is because of such uncertainties that the policy of the department is to promote the prudent approach of containment at source, utilizing best practicable technology.

Our review of the environmental assessment prepared by Syncrude lead to the conclusion that practicable technology was available that could reduce emission of SO_2 substantially below that authorized by the Alberta government in July of 1973. The technical review by the department in 1974 was based upon limited technical information available at that time. Since that time, meetings with both Syncrude and the Alberta Department of the Environment have continued in order to exchange technical data which will allow for more precise technical assessments and the reconciliation of differing viewpoints as to the practicality of control methods. We fully expect that substantial reductions in sulphur dioxide emissions will result.

While direct discussions have continued between the department, the Alberta Department of the Environment, and Syncrude in order to assess the control approaches necessary, the department has also drawn to the attention of Energy, Mines and Resources, the lead federal agency in this project, the need to ensure that environmental safeguards are given appropriate consideration by the management committee in line with federal policies in regard to pollution control.

[Mr. Goodale.]

TRANSPORT—ARRANGEMENTS FOR SHIPPING WHEAT THROUGH PORT OF CHURCHILL

Mr. Cecil Smith (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, tonight I should like once again to raise the issue of the port of Churchill in terms of its potential capacity for grain shipment. I do not like to sound repetitive, but I feel it is necessary for me to speak on this topic again especially in light of the fact that those responsible on the government side have paid seemingly little attention to the half dozen other speeches I have made in this House concerning the port of Churchill.

It is indeed unfortunate that I must stand up time and time again to try to sell such a unique northern facility like Churchill, not only as a member of parliament for the Churchill constituency but foremost as a concerned citizen of northern Manitoba. I shall continue to haunt those sitting across from me so that in time they may see the light and buy the idea of a northern port being used to capacity.

When dealing with this great mid-Canada inland seaport, it is not difficult to see that Churchill has many positive aspects, due mainly to its geographical location, that make this port most conducive to the shipment of large quantities of grain. Churchill itself boasts a railhead, an airport suitable for jet service and, of course, the deep water port, well protected with direct access to the sea.

These are important characteristics which the government seems to ignore. The port of Churchill, for those who are not familiar with its climate, location, and facilities, provides Manitoba with a unique distinction among the prairie provinces because of its access to the sea. There are 3,065 feet of wharf, with five deep sea berths and one coastal berth. The climate is in itself a major factor which makes Churchill an ideal grain port. The present shipping season usually starts around July 20 and lasts for the duration of the summer months until October 20, and the winter throughout the rest of the year provides superlative storage conditions because of low temperatures and humidity.

As I have said on previous occasions, farmers from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta benefit from the port because it provides ready access to European markets. Figures from the Canadian Grains Industry "Statistics Handbook '75" indicate the cost savings of shipping grain through the port of Churchill as opposed to other Canadian ports are indeed significant. To show just exactly how prairie farmers would benefit by moving grain through Churchill, I have the following examples.

To ship grain from Scott, Saskatchewan, to Rotterdam via Churchill rather than east coast ports, a saving of 32 cents per bushel would be realized. From Scott through Churchill as opposed to shipping through St. Lawrence ports would mean a saving of 18 cents a bushel. Churchill instead of Pacific coast ports would mean a 15 cent per bushel saving to the exporter.