

Adjournment Debate

the loan option for travel, we expect that they will repay those loans at the 95 per cent rate at which they repay the others.

Newcomers to Canada make an investment in their future, a Canadian future, and this is a small price to pay for living in the best country in the world.

LOW LEVEL FLIGHTS

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 3 in question period I brought to the attention of the House the report of the federal environmental assessment panel which reviewed low level military training flights in Labrador and Quebec. Approximately 6,000 to 7,000 low level training flights a year are currently being conducted out of Canadian forces base Goose Bay.

These flights are allowed under a 10-year multilateral memorandum of understanding agreement signed by Canada and the NATO allies which expires in 1996. The assessment panel report recommends that the government accept the Department of National Defence proposal to negotiate a new agreement that would more than double the number of flights, establish a new practice bombing range and expand the flight training area.

This would effectively concentrate the flights over traditional lands that have been used and occupied by the Innu nation for more than 9,000 years. After 10 years of experience observing the effects of these flights, the Innu contend that the noise adversely affects the wildlife, especially caribou, which they rely on for food.

The noise also causes the Innu mental and physical stress and disrupts their culture and traditional way of life. Many Innu boycotted the hearings because they felt these concerns as well as issues relating to aboriginal rights and land claims negotiations were not being adequately dealt with by the panel.

Although the panel did not adequately address the issues raised by aboriginal people, it did acknowledge that research concerning environmental effects on the flights was lacking. On this point the report is very clear: "So little is known about much of the wildlife in the training areas and the effects of overflights on them over the longer term that much uncertainty and hence concern remains. As a result the panel could not draw conclusions on the longer term effect of low level flying on the natural systems".

The panel therefore recommended that the project proceed only if key conditions are met and certain issues are dealt with. The first condition is that before a new low level flying agreement is signed and the flights are allowed to continue, the government must establish an independent institute to study and monitor the effects of the flights.

The panel also recommended that as soon as possible the government establish a joint management board for the George River caribou herd and settle aboriginal land claims in the affected area.

In question period the Minister of National Defence gave no indication of whether he agrees or disagrees with the report, if he would recommend that cabinet accept the report or what measures the government will take to ensure that the panel's conditions are met.

The government's own assessment panel admits the impacts on the environment and aboriginal rights are unknown and DND's avoidance procedures probably will not work. Does the government think that these flights should be allowed to continue when their effects are unknown? When one does not know the impact of something, it may not be wise to proceed.

It is important for the Innu people whose lives will continue to be affected by this program to know now if the government will accept the panel's report and, if the government does accept the recommendations in the report, what steps will be taken to address the issues identified by the panel and ensure that its major conditions including land claims negotiations will be met. This is an important point, especially since it appears clear that the provincial government of Newfoundland, because of the land claims dispute, will not enter into land claims negotiations with the Innu people. It is very important to know how the Government of Canada will respond to this very important matter.

● (1845)

The government must ensure that it does not address the economic interests of one group while ignoring the economic interests of another.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you will perhaps recall that the Department of National Defence had requested an environmental assessment be initiated to study the impact of an increase in the activity of low level flights at CFB Goose Bay.

The panel known as the FEARO panel has submitted its report to two of my colleagues, the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of National Defence. The panel has made every effort to hear from groups and individuals interested in putting their views forward. It has made recommendations to the government after considering their views.

[Translation]

The panel concluded that stopping the military flights would be very damaging to the region's economy. It recommended that this activity be allowed to continue, under certain conditions set out in the report. According to the seven members of the panel, there was little concrete evidence, at that stage, that the flights had a substantial negative impact on the environment, human health or the community.