

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

GREAT WHALE PROJECT

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of the Environment and concerns the Great Whale project.

Yesterday the minister told the House that work on the infrastructures will not begin before a complete environmental assessment of the whole project has been made. On his way out of the House, however, he flipped and flopped and made an about-turn when he stated that the road could be built before the completion of environmental studies on the entire project. So my question is: Who is telling the truth? The Minister of the Environment inside the House or the Minister of the Environment outside the House. Who is telling the truth? The Minister of the Environment last week or the Minister of the Environment today? Who, Mr. Speaker, is telling the truth? The Minister of the Environment this morning or the Minister of the Environment this afternoon?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I should like to respond to my colleague by quoting from yesterday's *Hansard*, for that might refresh his memory concerning what I said. This is what I said yesterday, as recorded in *Hansard* on page 15467:

Mr. Speaker, I would have liked the hon. member opposite to read a few more paragraphs from the letter, because at the beginning of this letter, Mr. Robinson explained very clearly, and I quote:

"The federal environmental assessment and review process, a federal resource for environmental assessment and review, applies to the Great Whale complex since it is expected to have an impact in areas that fall under federal jurisdiction such as fish, marine mammals, migratory birds and the ecology of Hudson Bay."

Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear from the letter that the federal government maintains all its prerogatives in terms of environmental assessment, and this is repeated throughout the document the hon. member just quoted.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to have a full environmental assessment process on the infrastructures and the project.

[English]

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, I must say after listening to that, I am beginning to have a lot of sympathy and I certainly understand the problems Grant Devine has with this minister.

• (1420)

[Translation]

My question is for the Minister of Justice. On October 3, 1989 the member for Lac-Saint-Jean, on November 23 the same year the Chairman of the Review Office, and on October 29, 1990 the Acting Minister of the Environment all confirmed federal jurisdiction over the Great Whale infrastructures. Only when this minister came on the scene did the federal government begin to backtrack.

Will the Minister of Justice impart some resolve to her colleague? Will she confirm that the James Bay Agreement does not reduce the federal jurisdiction over roads and airports? Will she finally explain the mysteries of life to him?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I think that the member opposite may rely too heavily on the media as a source of information. It is interesting that one of the largest media in English Canada ran this morning the headline: "Quebec permitted to start Hydro Project", with about three columns of text under it, while Mr. Francoeur's article, in *Le Devoir* was titled: "Ottawa concedes nothing to Quebec on Grande-Baleine." He even quoted the Quebec Minister of the Environment. Here is what he said:

In Quebec, the Minister of the Environment did not look like a minister who just got the go-ahead from Ottawa. Brushing aside the hasty conclusions of the reporters, the minister pointed out that the president of the FEARO did not give Quebec a free hand in his letter. Instead, he reaffirmed Ottawa's jurisdiction in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what we did. We reaffirmed our jurisdiction in this matter.

[English]

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, this is beyond belief. I was outside. I heard what the minister said in the lobby. I know and the Cree know what the minister's representative said at the meetings and I heard a direct contradiction of what the minister has just said.