

*Government Orders*

On the list of concerns the environment has moved to the fore. In fact the environment was always one of the main concerns of building a fixed link of any sort across the Northumberland Strait. To show environmental compliance the following clauses are included in the federal-provincial agreement. I think these clauses are extremely important and I will quote them in their entirety. Clause 6(1) reads:

Public participation in the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process, commonly known as EARP, was undertaken to the satisfaction of Canada, P.E.I., and New Brunswick.

Canada through its Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Environment Canada, and Transport Canada, in conjunction with the provinces of P.E.I. and New Brunswick had deemed that a fixed crossing can be constructed in an environmentally acceptable manner.

Clause 6(2) reads:

The construction and operation of the fixed crossing shall comply with the environmental laws, regulation, and relevant environmental codes of practice of the provinces of New Brunswick and P.E.I. and the government of Canada, as well as other specific requirements identified by means of the evaluation conducted under the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process.

Clause 6(3) reads:

As a condition to the coming into effect of this agreement and prior to financial closing, the developer must obtain the necessary approvals under provincial and applicable federal environmental assessment legislation and complete an environmental management plan acceptable to Canada, New Brunswick, P.E.I. and the province of Nova Scotia.

The inclusion of these three clauses in the federal-provincial agreement to proceed with construction of the fixed link is extremely important. It tells us that all three governments have agreed that the environmental studies conducted to this juncture are more than adequate to ensure that any potential environmental difficulty has been mitigated to the point where we can proceed without undue concern.

Environmental concerns have been the most pervasive of any reservation that people have had about the construction of the link. Consequently much of the study of the proposed link has been devoted to these environmental concerns.

Back in January 1989 the federal government appointed a panel to review the equity, environmental,

social and economic impacts of the project. Public Works Canada published a bridge concept proposal which attempted to address all the environmental aspects of the project.

During the summer of 1989 the review panel held some focus sessions in communities in P.E.I. and New Brunswick to determine whether the information base was sound enough to proceed to public hearings. Later that year Public Works Canada published a supplement to the bridge concept assessment so that the review panel would have more information with which to work.

In March 1990, 12 federal public hearings were held in order to provide people with an opportunity to present their views on the project. Approximately 150 groups and individuals took advantage of the opportunity provided.

In August, the FEARO panel published a report which contained suggestions for proceeding with an environmentally acceptable project. One of the major concerns expressed by the panel dealt with ice and ice-out delays in the strait if a bridge were to be built.

Nothing more than a two-day delay would be acceptable. That is a two-day delay over a 100-year period. Environment Canada responded to these concerns by appointing a committee of ice experts to study the impact of a bridge on ice-out time in the strait in the spring.

This was done in November 1991. The committee reported in April 1992 and concluded: "A bridge which meets the criteria for ice delay established by the FEARO panel can be installed across the Northumberland Strait".

In May 1991, the Minister of Public Works announced that developers were invited to resubmit their proposals for the project. These proposals would then be evaluated against the government's financial criteria and the environmental requirements outlined in the federal government's response to the FEARO panel report.

The result of this process was that the company Strait Crossing Incorporated, commonly known as SCI, won the bid. Although SCI has been chosen as the company which will build the fixed crossing, it has yet to enter into a contractual agreement with Public Works Canada. The company had to develop a financial plan and an environmental management plan before moving to the contractual stage.