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[The Great Whale review and the federal government's disappearing act](#)

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Abstract

[en] After considerable political and legal pressure, the Canadian and Quebec governments, plus the electric utility Hydro-Quebec, agreed to a global review and environmental assessment of the Great Whale hydroelectric project in northern Quebec. The assessment is being handled by five committees, each covering distinct areas of geography and responsibility. The initial task of the review committees was to determine the scope of the assessment, and 23 days of public hearings were held in northern and southern Quebec and on the Belcher Islands. The federal government's absence from the scoping hearings was a curious development, since federal agencies normally participate actively in such hearings. A federal guidelines order upheld recently by the Canadian Supreme Court requires federal participation in environmental assessment processes. The Great Whale project affects areas of federal jurisdiction as well as areas outside Quebec, and federal expertise in such matters as the marine environment is crucial in airing environmental issues related to the project. Interviews with federal officials on the reasons for federal absence are summarized. It is concluded that the federal agencies did not really regard scoping hearings as part of the public review, and that this review does not start until hearings begin on the environmental impact statement

Primary Subject

[HYDRO ENERGY \(C5621\)](#)

Record Type

Journal article

Journal

Northern Perspectives; ISSN 0380-5522; ; CODEN NPEREJ; v. 20(2); p. 2-5

Country of publication

[Canada](#)

Descriptors (DEI)

[ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY](#), [HEARINGS](#), [HYDROELECTRIC POWER PLANTS](#), [LEGAL ASPECTS](#), [QUEBEC](#)

Descriptors (DEC)

[CANADA](#), [DEVELOPED COUNTRIES](#), [NORTH AMERICA](#), [POWER PLANTS](#)

Publication Year

[1991](#)

Language

[English](#)

Reference Number

[25018061](#)

INIS Volume

[25](#)

INIS Issue

[6](#)