

Dear Milan Ilnycky,

Thank you for writing me on the Standing Committee of Environment and Sustainable Development's (ENVI) recent study of the oil sands and water resources. I share your concern that has been expressed by many Canadians about the possible impact of the oil sands development on our environment, particularly in Northern Alberta and adjacent provinces.

It is important to note that the proceedings of the deliberations of the ENVI committee meetings were made in-camera. For this reason, I cannot discuss publically who voted for or against the motion to end the study. I want to stress that **all** members of the committee were serious, passionate and concerned about this issue.

A general observation of this Parliament is that no political party has enough members to control any committee without the support of other members from other parties. On the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, the opposition members have more voting members than the Government, and any decision made by the committee must have the support of at least one opposition party.

That said, the ENVI committee's work has provided a valuable insight into the relationship between oil sands and water resources for parliamentarians and all Canadians. Of the various political parties that make up the committee, each has their perspective on the oil sands and I expect that many parties will wish to make public commentary and

recommendations based on what they heard at committee.

Canadians are also free to take advantage of the online versions of the testimony provided to committee at <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/CommitteeBusiness/StudyActivityHome.aspx?Cmte=ENVI&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=3&Stac=3052146>. You can access testimony by using the calendar and clicking on the “evidence” tab on dates where the committee heard from witnesses on oil sands and water resources.

As a Government, we have been out front on this issue. We understand and acknowledge the extraordinary economic value of the oil sands to the Canadian economy. We also understand that we must remain vigilant to ensure that oil sands development proceeds in an environmentally responsible way.

The Minister of Environment, Jim Prentice, is demonstrating the proactive approach being taken by the Government of Canada by taking the following steps with the department to increase monitoring in the oil sands region:

Over the past year, Environment Canada officials have been monitoring, and have undertaken a number of studies of the impact on air quality, as well as on the potential seepage from the oil sands development into the Athabasca River and into groundwater.

This year, Environment officials are stepping up the environmental

monitoring and science efforts. As a result, some significant investments are being made in the following areas: chemical fingerprinting, groundwater monitoring, air quality monitoring, enforcement, and water quantity assessment and monitoring.

Chemical fingerprinting is a new \$1.6M science program that includes state-of-the-art analytical equipment into chemical fingerprinting so we can identify if chemicals produced in the oil sands operations are seeping into the surrounding environment. This equipment and research support will allow scientists to identify unique chemical compounds produced during oil sands processing that can be used as ‘fingerprints’ in the ecosystem.

Groundwater sampling is being expanded almost four-fold to 100 sites primarily along the Athabasca River in the vicinity of the oil sands tailings facilities. Samples will mainly be collected from groundwater beneath streams but will also include existing land-based monitoring wells.

Up to four new air quality monitoring sites are planned for sites in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They will be added to the network of 32 sites that are part of the Canadian Air and Precipitation Monitoring Network (CAPMon). The first of these sites will be established in northern Saskatchewan, downwind of the oil sands area, in summer-fall 2010. As well, tools are being developed to strengthen air quality standards and drive air-management actions to reduce emissions of air pollutants from contributing sources.

Environment Canada’s Enforcement officials are reviewing regular

groundwater monitoring data to ensure oil sands operations are in compliance (under s36(3) Fisheries Act) and are not impacting water quality.

Water quantity assessment and monitoring is assessing the historical climate and stream flow variability/trends within the Athabasca River Watershed and will be completed this year. This will give scientists information on the potential implications of water withdrawals on the river system. Monitoring is important because it gives us a better picture of the potential environmental impacts of oil sands development. I would stress that the need for more monitoring was an impression I received from testimony at committee.

As a Government, we understand that it is important to conserve our environment to ensure economic prosperity and quality of life for generations to come. We will continue to work to enhance monitoring in the oil sands region to ensure the sustainability of the Athabasca region and adjoining waterways.

While the oil sands are important, it is also vital we continue to monitor and improve our environment across the country. With this in mind, it is important that the work of the ENVI Committee move forward. We are looking forward to a productive legislative agenda in the fall which includes important mandatory statutory reviews including the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, Species at Risk Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

The ENVI committee workload is heavy and we must give priority to legislation which impacts our environment and the lives of all

Canadians. I look forward to continuing this work in our fall session.

I appreciate you taking the time to write me on this important issue.

Sincerely,

James Bezan

Member of Parliament

Selkirk-Interlake, Manitoba

Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Chair, Manitoba Conservative Caucus