

Poplar River First Nation

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May 10, 2024

To: IAAC

From: Poplar River First Nation

About: PRFN comments about the IAAC draft final report about the review under CEAA, conducted by IAAC for the Lake Manitoba Lake St Martin Lake Winnipeg Channel project.

This memo is the cover sheet for the notes about IAAC's final draft report from the in-community meeting in Poplar River First Nation on May 6, 2024.

1)

For those interested in PRFN contributions and participation to this EIS review you can find our comments on the original EIS, our comments on the proponent's answer to Information Requests about the project from IAAC, and other correspondence in the IAAC public registry between 2018 and 2024.

2)

We would suggest reading the concerns from PRFN at the front of our comments on the Round Two Information Request answers from MTI. Those concerns are as valid and important now as then.

3)

IAAC identified additional potentially affected First Nations for the list of participants early in the Channel project reviews. We feel these were important decisions. All the First Nation and Indigenous participants – with their consultants and experts – have done important work during this lengthy set of reviews. The scope and number of potential impacts increased while the potential range of those impacts also increased with these First Nations also participating.

4)

Round Three Information Requests from IAAC to MTI were important repeat attempts to get answers to questions about First Nation and Indigenous communities, engagement with communities, and how the proponent understood and would use the knowledge of the participants. IAAC did well in their efforts to confirm that MTI would fulfil the Indigenous Guideline for the EIS under CEAA.

5)

MTI did not learn from publicly available information about our nation. Our lands plan, regulations to protect our lands in place since 1998, maps, and the Manitoba Act that protects our lands were there for them to learn and be ready to engage our community. They did not seem to be aware of the islands we made sure were protected in Lake Winnipeg. Instead, they complained about our nation. The responsibility was theirs, and they failed.

6)

IAAC and the experts from different federal departments have taken a long view of this project's life and confirmed in their Conditions that the involvement of potentially affected communities is needed. We hope that they take the same approach for the life of the waters and the species—for the life of the project.

7)

PRFN concerns include the communities most affected and potentially affected by the operation of the Channel. Our relatives on the site intended for the Channel will be most impacted, as may others in the Interlake, around Lake Winnipeg, and downstream be impacted.

8)

We are also concerned about the other communities and municipalities that could be affected by the project, who have not been engaged and have very little information. Cottagers, Fishers, and landowners could be affected. They are at risk from impacts from the Channel and the water that would run through old water structures, through the intended Channel, and into Lake Winnipeg. Non-Indigenous communities should also be informed.

9)

PRFN held a meeting May 6 in our community with our consultant to discuss the IAAC draft final assessment and conditions report for the Channel project. (See the meeting notes attached.) We identified a set of Conditions for the Channel we support. These are:

- a. 3.1
- b. 3.3
- c. 3.6
- d. 3.8
- e. 3.9
- f. 3.13
- g. 7.1
- h. 8.1
- i. 9.1
- j. 10.1c

10)

Some specific issues that PRFN still does not think are adequately addressed are water, water quality, sedimentation, contamination, fish and fish habitat, invasive species, shoreline erosion and groundwater contamination.

11)

Poplar River First Nation is also concerned about adequate support for brothers and sisters in the immediate construction area.

12)

Confirmation of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights for potentially affected First Nation and Aboriginal rights confirmed for Metis communities should be a condition of any decision about this project..