



July 9, 2024

The Hon. Steven Guilbeault  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
200 Sacré-Coeur Boulevard  
Gatineau QC K1A 0H

Impact Assessment Agency of Canada  
Ontario Region  
600-55 York Street  
Toronto, Ontario MSJ 1R7  
Attention: Anjala Puvanathan (Director, Ontario Region)

**Re: Great Bear Resources Ltd. ("Great Bear") – Great Bear Gold Project ("Project") – Response to Asubpeeschosewagong Netum Anishinabek ("ANA") Request for Review Panel**

We are writing in response to the letter dated 17 June 2024 ("**Request Letter**") from ANA to the Impact Assessment Agency ("**IAAC**") requesting a review panel pursuant to section 36 of the *Impact Assessment Act* ("**Act**") to review the Project.

For the reasons set out in this letter, Great Bear submits that a review panel is not necessary for the assessment of the Project under the Act. A thorough, comprehensive impact assessment ("**IA**") can be undertaken through the IAAC-led process. The IAAC-led process is also adaptable to respond in detail to specific issues that may arise related to Indigenous community interests.

**1. Section 36(2) establishes the Minister's decision criteria**

The Minister's authority to refer an impact assessment to a review panel is set out in section 36(2) of the Act, which reads as follows:

36(2). The Minister's determination regarding whether the referral of the impact assessment of the designated project to a review panel is in the public interest must include a consideration of the following factors:

- (a) the extent to which the effects within federal jurisdiction or the direct or incidental effects that the carrying out of the designated project may cause are adverse;
- (b) public concerns related to those effects;
- (c) opportunities for cooperation with any jurisdiction that has powers, duties or functions in relation to an assessment of the environmental effects of the designated project or any part of it; and

- (d) any adverse impact that the designated project may have on the rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The circumstances of this Project assessment do not warrant a panel review based on a reasonable consideration of any of the relevant criteria in section 36(2). The ANA request focusses on potential impacts that fall under section 36(2)(d), which we respond to in section 4.

## **2. Mining activity in the Red Lake area is common, and the effects are well-understood.**

The Project is in the Red Lake District in Ontario, a prolific mining district with an almost 100-year mining history. Given the large number of mining projects that have operated in this area, the geological, environmental, and social characteristics of the area are well-studied and understood. The local communities derive many benefits from the mining in the area, including employment and contracting to support those communities, and support mining.

Mining activities in the Red Lake District are subject to stringent environmental regulations and oversight by federal and provincial authorities. Accordingly, mining operations adhere to applicable environmental standards and manage any risks to local ecosystems and communities to appropriate standards.

Indigenous communities in the area have experience engaging with mining proponents and have negotiated various agreements and economic collaborations, resulting in community investments, employment opportunities, sustainable development, local land stewardship protocols, and an increase in positive, equitable relationships.

The existing record within the relevant provincial and federal regulatory agencies establishes a solid foundation to provide additional context for the Project-specific information that Great Bear will file for this IA.

## **3. Local Indigenous communities support mining if their interests are met**

Great Bear has engaged with local Indigenous communities throughout the federal environmental assessment process thus far. Because of Great Bear's meaningful consultation and engagement, Lac Seul First Nation ("**Lac Seul**") and Wabauskang First Nation ("**WFN**") have indicated that they are open to the Project if the Project meets their interests.

Lac Seul and WFN have supported the Advanced Exploration program preceding the Project, and are engaged in negotiations with Great Bear for an agreement on the mine phase of the Project which would establish the basis upon which the Project would proceed with their support.

The Minister and IAAC must assess and reconcile the interests of Great Bear and all the local communities that will be affected by the AEX Permit and the Project.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See the [Ermineskin Cree Nation v. Canada \(Environment and Climate Change\), 2021 FC 758 \(CanLII\)](#) case, in which the Federal Court decided that the Crown must consult with and consider the impact on the economic rights and benefits of Indigenous communities who have economic accommodation agreements.

#### **4. The location, nature, and scale of the Project do not create the potential for adverse impacts that warrant the appointment of a Review Panel**

In its letter to the IAAC, ANA cited various mine projects that had been referred to an independent review panel. Each of these projects had unique circumstances and potential impacts that are not analogous to the Great Bear Project. Specifically, those projects had circumstances that added to the complexity of their assessment, including the following: unique environmental conditions; a larger scale and scope of the construction or operation; a larger operational footprint or facilities; or local opposition.

It is more relevant to consider the Project on its own merits and against projects in the same region or Ontario. As noted in section 3 above, the region is a prolific mining region with many mine projects. Compared to other projects in the region, the Great Bear Project has less potential for adverse effects for the following reasons:

- The geographic footprint is relatively small.
- The construction and operation will involve well-understood practices that do not involve any complications or novel features.
- The potential environmental effects are limited in nature and scale and can be minimized by reasonable mitigation measures.
- The mining and processing will occur on the same site.
- The logistics to support the operation will be limited in nature and scale.
- The construction and operation will employ leading industry practice.

Other Ontario projects that have been larger in nature, scale and complexity have been assessed without the need for an independent review panel, including the following examples:

- The Greenstone Gold Project near Geraldton involved moving a highway, diverting a fish-bearing stream, a brownfield site with contaminated arsenic issues, a much larger processing plant, and required the relocation of historical tailings into the newly constructed tailings facility.
- The Côte Gold Project near Sudbury involved moving and draining streams and lakes, and has a much larger processing plant than what is planned for the Great Bear Project.
- The Magino Gold Project near Wawa involved moving and draining streams and a lake.
- The Detour Gold Project near Cochrane involved moving and draining streams and lakes, and a much larger processing plant.

The projects cited by ANA in other regions also involved elements that differ from the Great Bear Project. For example:

- The Marathon Platinum Group Metals and Copper Mine Project was an open-pit mine for platinum group metals and copper in Ontario. It involved substantial surface disturbance and

potential effects on the environment, including effects on wetlands and water bodies, water quality, aquatic ecosystems, and wildlife habitats. Indigenous communities raised issues regarding the adequacy and meaningfulness of consultation processes, as well as voiced concerns about the potential impacts of mining activities on culturally significant sites, archaeological resources and sacred areas within the project area.

- Suncor Base Mine Extension Project (Alberta)
- Rose Lithium – Tantalum Mine Project and the James Bay Lithium Mine Project (Quebec)
- The Grassy Mountain Coal Project in Alberta was large-scale open-pit coal mine that involved substantial changes to the landscape and local ecosystems and raised concerns about potential impacts on water quality, wildlife habitat, and Indigenous rights.
- Robb Trend Coal Mine Expansion Project (Alberta)
- Frontier Oil Sands Mine Project (Alberta)
- Jackpine Mine Expansion Project (Alberta)
- Pierre River Mine Project (Alberta)
- The Prosperity Gold-Copper and New Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine Projects in British Columbia was an open-pit gold-copper mine located in the Fish Creek Watershed, a part of the Fraser River watershed. The area is ecologically sensitive and supports critical spawning and rearing habitats for salmon species, and the project's development would have involved significant disturbances to the local environment, including the potential for acid mine drainage and impacts on water quality. Local communities, environmental organization, and Indigenous communities raised concerns about the potential for long-term environmental damage, risks to local water resources, impacts on recreational and tourism activities, and overall sustainability of the proposed development in the area.

## **5. The IAAC-led IA is comprehensive and sufficient**

The IAAC-led IA is comprehensive and adaptable to meet the needs of the participants. It is more than sufficient to assess any potential environmental, social, health, cultural, or economic impacts of the Project. IAAC can call on expertise from the other federal agencies as needed and work collaboratively with the provincial agencies with expertise.

IAAC has expertise and experience to consult with and respond to all reasonable concerns raised by Indigenous and local communities.

## **6. Concluding comments**

Great Bear seeks to establish a positive, collaborative relationship with the local Indigenous communities and will respond to all reasonable interests. Great Bear believes it can undertake all phases of the Project in a manner that respects those interests through good practice in the design and implementation of the Project, incorporating input from the Indigenous communities.

Great Bear follows industry best practices, adhering to all relevant and applicable federal, provincial, and local regulations governing mining activities. A key tenet of Great Bear's operations is its commitment to meeting or exceeding environmental standards through their environmental management plans, mitigation measures and monitoring protocols.

Great Bear would be pleased to elaborate on any of the points in this letter.

We look forward to your response.

Regards,

<Signature removed>

Luke Crosby, Director  
Great Bear Resources Ltd., *A Kinross Gold Company*

cc.

Ashley Moncrief, Environmental Manager, Great Bear Resources Ltd., *A Kinross Company*  
Aaron MacDonell, Director, Environmental Services, Great Bear Resources Ltd., *A Kinross Company*  
Ian Russell, Site Manager, Great Bear Resources Ltd., *A Kinross Company*  
Joseph Fobister, Land Protection Team Lead, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek  
Mike Fobister, Land Protection Team Coordinator, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek  
Jackie Esmonde, Land Protection Team Legal Counsel, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek  
Dan Mossip- Balkwill, Land Protection Team Advisor, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek  
David Sone, Land Protection Team Advisor, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek  
Rudy Turtle, Chief, Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek