



City of Dryden  
30 Van Horne Avenue  
Dryden, ON P8N 2A7  
Tel: (807) 223-2225 | [www.dryden.ca](http://www.dryden.ca)

February 3, 2026

Impact Assessment Agency of Canada  
22nd Floor, Place Bell  
160 Elgin Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0H3

*Via Electronic Submission*

**RE: Socioeconomic Impact Statement – Nuclear Waste Management Organization Deep Geological Repository Project**

Dear Members of the Review Panel:

On behalf of the City of Dryden, please accept this impact statement submission regarding the Nuclear Waste Management Organization's (NWMO) proposed Deep Geological Repository (DGR) for used nuclear fuel to be constructed within approximately 55 kilometres of our community. The City of Dryden recognizes the national importance of this project and the part the DGR plays in addressing Canada's nuclear waste management obligations as well as recognizing the benefit of economic development in our region. However, we must ensure that the Agency, through the Federal Impact Assessment, fully understands the significant socioeconomic impacts this project will have on our community and the critical need for comprehensive mitigation measures.

Dryden is the regional hub for our geographic area of Northwestern Ontario, serving a population far beyond our municipal boundaries. Our community is the base for many essential services such as healthcare, retail & services, education, and many municipal services for surrounding municipalities including the Town of Ignace, First Nation communities such as Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation and Eagle Lake First Nation as well as others, and approximately 4,000 residents in the surrounding unincorporated territories. Dryden's retail and service sector services a surrounding population of over 22,000. The costs of providing many of the services that benefit the greater area population fall disproportionately on Dryden's 7,388 municipal taxpayers.

**Disproportionate Impact on Indigenous Residents**

Any assessment of this project's impacts must acknowledge that Indigenous peoples will bear a disproportionate burden of negative consequences. Over 22% of Dryden's population identifies as Indigenous, and within the broader Kenora Census Division, Indigenous peoples constitute approximately 49.8% of the population—representing 32,355 individuals. This is among the highest Indigenous population concentrations in Ontario.

Indigenous residents already face systemic barriers in accessing healthcare, housing, and social services. Population growth and increased competition for limited resources will amplify these existing inequities. The strains on healthcare, housing affordability, social services, and employment that are outlined in this submission will disproportionately affect Indigenous families and communities. We urge the Agency to

give particular weight to these impacts in its assessment, recognizing that the negative consequences of inadequate mitigation across the healthcare, social services, education, and municipal sectors will fall most heavily on those who are already marginalized.

### **Municipal Services and Infrastructure**

The City of Dryden estimates an annual budget of approximately \$35.6 million for 2026, delivering a comprehensive range of municipal services and infrastructure investment including water and wastewater treatment, road maintenance, fire protection, police services, transit, parks and recreation, library services, emergency management, and land use planning. Our ratepayers also bear financial responsibility for provincially-mandated levied services including land ambulance, childcare, housing services, social assistance, public health, and long-term care—representing a significant portion of our annual expenditures.

Any significant population growth in the region will place extraordinary pressure on these services, no matter if the growth happens within municipal jurisdiction or outside of it. Unlike larger urban centres, Dryden does not have the competitive position to implement development charges that would allow "growth to pay for growth." Instead, the burden of accommodating this growth will fall on existing property taxpayers through increased levies and user fees. Our current residential property tax rate of 2.03% is already among the highest in Northern Ontario. Alongside the burden of financing costs associated to growth, the municipality is struggling to manage an infrastructure deficit estimated at approximately \$372 million and growing year over year. Without substantial mitigation funding, growth related costs will drive taxes and fees to unaffordable levels, potentially displacing long-term residents, particularly those on fixed incomes and Indigenous families who are already economically vulnerable.

### **Healthcare System Impacts**

The Dryden Regional Health Centre (DRHC) operates 42 acute care beds and is supported by 14 physicians, including two full-time emergency department physicians. The region's healthcare system is already severely strained, with large number of hospital beds occupied by patients awaiting placement in long-term care or other community services that are inadequate or unavailable. Staff recruitment and retention is an ongoing crisis, with physician recruitment intensely competitive across Canada.

The forecasted population growth will overwhelm a system already operating at capacity. Emergency department wait times will increase, hospital beds will become even scarcer, and the shortage of family physicians will worsen, leaving more residents without primary care. The DRHC's aging infrastructure and equipment already limit service delivery and expansion capacity. Without significant investment in healthcare infrastructure, physician recruitment incentives, expanded long-term care capacity, and enhanced community-based services, healthcare outcomes for all residents, including the existing population, will deteriorate. Indigenous patients, who already face barriers to culturally competent care, will be particularly affected.

### **Housing Crisis Intensification**



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Dryden is already experiencing a housing crisis. Rental unit vacancy rate is estimated at only 3.0%, with rental rates for modern units ranging from \$1,575 to \$2,345 monthly or higher. These costs are unaffordable for many residents in a community where median household income (\$72,000) falls below the provincial average (\$79,500). Average home prices of approximately \$300,000, combined with high construction costs and a lack of developers willing to assume development risk, have created a shortage across many areas of the housing spectrum.

The influx of well-compensated DGR workers will dramatically increase demand for housing, driving up prices and rents. Long-term residents, particularly those on fixed incomes, seniors, and Indigenous families, risk being priced out of their community. Waitlists for subsidized housing will grow. Without proactive investment in housing development across all income levels—including social and affordable housing—this project will displace vulnerable residents and fundamentally alter Dryden's community character.

### **Social Services and Public Safety**

Rapid population growth associated with major industrial projects historically correlates with increased demand for social services and heightened public safety challenges. Dryden already bears some of the highest per capita policing costs in Ontario at \$575 per resident. Increased population and economic activity will generate additional calls for service, potentially increasing property crimes, substance abuse issues, and domestic violence which are patterns well-documented in communities experiencing resource-sector booms.

Our land ambulance service operates with two crews serving a large geographical area. Population growth will strain response times and service capacity. Social service caseloads will increase, with longer waitlists for childcare, housing assistance, and financial support programs. Mental health and addiction services, already inadequate, will face greater demand. These impacts will be felt most acutely by Indigenous residents, who are already overrepresented in social service caseloads due to systemic inequities.

### **Workforce and Economic Disruption**

While the 600-700 direct jobs created by the DGR represent an economic benefit, they also pose significant risks to existing employers. Dryden's economy depends on employers including Dryden Fibre Canada, the Ministry of Natural Resources, healthcare and education sectors, retail and service businesses, and the municipality itself. These employers will face intense competition for workers, potentially forcing unsustainable wage increases or operational reductions.

Dryden has experienced the devastating consequences of industrial disruption before. The permanent closure of fine paper manufacturing at the Dryden mill resulted in dramatic workforce reductions, reduced facility footprint (lower property assessment), and lasting economic trauma. While we welcome diversified employment opportunities, we cannot allow a new industry to destabilize existing employers and create a socio-economic power imbalance that leaves our community vulnerable to future boom-bust cycles.



### Community Image and Tourism

Dryden's tourism economy, centered on fishing, hunting, and outdoor recreation, depends entirely on perceptions of pristine natural resources. Even unfounded perceptions that our forests and waterways have been affected by nuclear waste storage could devastate this sector. Lodges, outfitters, and tourism-dependent businesses could face reduced visitation, diminished property values, and potential closure.

The stigma associated with proximity to a nuclear waste facility may affect community identity, resident morale, and our ability to attract new residents, healthcare professionals, and business investment. These reputational impacts require proactive communication strategies, tourism marketing support, and economic diversification assistance.

### Conclusion and Call for Comprehensive Mitigation

The City of Dryden submits that, absent comprehensive mitigation measures, the DGR project will result in a **net negative impact** on our residents. The burden of serving as the regional hub for a nationally significant project must not fall solely on Dryden's taxpayers. Our residents deserve to **benefit from this project—not merely survive it**. The project proponent has already committed to quantified and unquantified community benefits for the DGR host communities, but Dryden's future remains uncertain in this regard. However, it is with certainty that the regional hub community will experience the pressures of growth.

We call upon the Impact Assessment Agency to require, as conditions of project approval, binding commitments from the proponent and senior levels of government to fully mitigate impacts across all affected sectors, including:

- Municipal infrastructure and services funding to accommodate growth and accompanying impacts throughout the project's entire lifecycle, on an equitable, per capita comparison to the municipal DGR host community
- Healthcare system investments including, physician recruitment, facility expansion and equipment funding, and long-term care capacity
- Housing development support across all income levels, with particular attention to affordable and social housing
- Social services capacity enhancement including childcare, mental health, and addiction services
- Workforce development programs that support existing employers while creating pathways for local and Indigenous employment as well as northern rural pathways for immigration workforce
- Education sector investment to ensure programming and infrastructure capacity is adequately addressed
- Tourism and economic development support to protect and diversify our economy



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The project proponent, the Province of Ontario, and the Government of Canada all have obligations to ensure that the communities bearing the impacts of this nationally critical project receive commensurate benefits and protection. Indigenous residents, who will be disproportionately affected by inadequate mitigation, must be central to any benefit-sharing framework.

Dryden City Council stands prepared to support this project with conditions. However, without enforceable commitments to comprehensive mitigation, supporting a project that will leave our community worse off than before will be very difficult. We trust the Agency will give these concerns the serious consideration they deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger Nesbit, Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Dryden

*cc: Mayor and Council, City of Dryden;*

*The Right Honourable Mark Carney, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada;*

*The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, M.P.P.*

*The Honourable Tim Hodgson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Energy and Natural Resources*

*The Honourable Stephen Lecce, M.P.P., Minister of Energy and Mines;*

*The Honourable Greg Rickford, M.P.P., Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, M.P.P. for Kenora-Rainy River;*

*Mr. Eric Melillo, M.P., Member of Parliament for Kenora—Kiiwetinoong;*

*Mr. Robert Buhr, Senior Project Officer, Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission;*

*Ms. Laurie Swami, President and CEO of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization*