

OTH-1004

EXHIBIT #
WUSKWATIM GENERATION
& TRANSMISSION PROJECT

R.G.
CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION



THOMPSON
Chamber of Commerce

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The Thompson Chamber of Commerce

Presentation to the

*Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
Wuskwatim Generation and Transmission Project*

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My name is Bob Wall; I am the President of the Thompson Chamber of Commerce. My Chamber welcomes this commission to our City. Our message is concise.

We are pleased to see that this Commission includes at least one Northern Manitobian. At least one member is familiar with the region and specifically familiar with this location. My chamber is encouraged that this commission has come to the one of the locations that will receive the greatest frontline impact from this project.

Our chamber, as well the citizens of Thompson, are beginning to embark on the adventure of fashioning a city that must transform itself from reliance upon the mining industry to self reliance. As we work our way through this transition, this generating station and more importantly, the decision making process regarding this project, are crucial to our future.

I came to Thompson 20 years ago. For the past 15 years I have been a partner in a northern Manitobian accounting firm. My clients are basically from the immediate Thompson area, but I do travel from Norway House and Cross Lake in the south, to Churchill in the North. I have clients as far east as God's Lake Narrows to Lynn Lake in the west. I have seen the impact of past hydroelectric projects in Manitoba.

This presentation will focus on the following topics;

- Environment
- Economy
- Self-determination
- Skilled work force
- Ongoing reporting on the progress of the project

As I travel through Northern Manitoba I repeatedly witness the environmental damage created by flooding the rivers and lakes that feed the hydroelectric dams. Even though I came to Thompson after the damage was done and I never saw it before the flooding, I can never get over the effect of the basic scars upon our landscape caused by this flooding.

My Chamber of Commerce and I realise that you cannot go back to pre development days. We are encouraged that this project will create minimum environmental damage on a waterway that is already damaged by continuous flooding. We encourage Manitoba Hydro and its partners to continue mitigation regarding this and other affected waterways.

Since the Wuskwatim project will cause minimum impact upon the environment, our Chamber does not see an environmental reason for not continuing with this project.

We see that, a large quantity of reliable energy is vital to our province's economy. Electric energy at a reasonable cost, to the provincial users as well as provincial export customers will assist our economy and be part of the possible transformation of Manitoba from a "have not" to a "have" province. Just like the Province of Alberta has build part of its economy on energy, we can build part of our economy upon sustainable energy generation.

These types of projects can enhance the economy of Northern Manitoba. This project will bring training to an unskilled workforce. Hydroelectric development is an excellent way to build infrastructure in the province and to expand the northern frontier.

Our local economy is becoming more reliant on a healthy aboriginal based economy. The aboriginal peoples are our "new economy". The mining industry has become the "old economy". Even if more significant mineral discoveries are made in the next decade we realise that a new discovery will not build a new city or town or provide ongoing sustainable cash flow for the north. To our chamber members an aboriginal based economy fed by the eventual cashflows from the partnerships in hydroelectric projects, will continue to provide us with a healthy customer and consumer base.

An aboriginal based economy for Thompson means expanding our position as a northern service centre. A strong Aboriginal based economy will enhance Thompson as a medical, political, educational, shopping and recreation centre for the surrounding region.

Chief Primrose and his council have prepared a direction for their first nation that will make its best efforts to turn dependence on social assistance and government programs into self-reliance. The proposed partnership with Manitoba Hydro is a key to this direction

The Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages Manitoba Hydro and the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation to maintain this partnership as a basic lynchpin to the Wuskwatim Project.

We in northern Manitoba have become quite reluctant to follow the suggestions and imperatives provided by experts imported to our region of the province to provide us with direction. Quite often these experts have not 'walked a mile in our shoes". They have no concept of life without their type of infrastructure. They do not realise the vastness of our spaces and the difficulty of living in an environment of poor roads, harsh weather, isolation and the difficulties of communicating within the many separate groups in Northern Manitoba. We live in a unique part of the country. Over the years we have watched the experts set up poorly prepared programs for us, tampered with our lives and ignored our very real needs. We sense that now these people again, as good hearted as they are, want to guide us to a solution that meets their needs not necessarily ours.

In the case of the Wuskwatim Project, it is refreshing to see that a first nation can determine its own participation in this project. The Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation will determine if it wants to participate. This upcoming decision will not be easy for them. Too many of the band members have painful memories of the last time Manitoba Hydro approached them to build a hydro dam. We are confident that they will be able to make a thoughtful decision. No matter how they

decide either for or against, everyone must respect that decision. That decision is as important as the decisions that will be made by this commission. We must allow the members of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation the space required to make this decision without interference.

The Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation to continue its process to a fair informed vote regarding the decision to participate in the Wuskwatim project.

The Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada to include the decision of this upcoming vote in the process of determining the future for the Wuskwatim project.

Just like other parts of the Province we have people who are unemployed and yet decent jobs go unfilled. The Thompson Chamber of Commerce sees this as one of the most significant detriments to business expansion in Thompson and the surrounding region. The basic life skills training provided in anticipation of this project as well as the ongoing trades training will enhance our skilled labour pool. Many of these new trainees will spend some time on the construction of Wuskwatim, but more importantly they will be able to assist in the reconstruction of northern housing and other infrastructure long after Wuskwatim has been built.

Should Wuskwatim be the beginning of a series of hydroelectric construction projects then the training provided for this project might provide the start to a good career for a current trainee.

The Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages the ongoing training provided by the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation to its members and other participants.

We realise that the hydroelectric construction in the 1960's and 70's caused significant disruption and damage to the first nation's peoples. We also recognise that much of the damage was created by misinterpreted promises as well as promises not kept. We also realise that if these difficulties are repeated should Wuskwatim be built the rift between the peoples of the north will not be reconcilable. Both partners must make their best efforts to ensure that the aims, goals, and benchmarks for this project are clearly defined and that actual performance is consistently monitored to these benchmarks and goals.

Should this project continue the Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and Manitoba Hydro clearly and publicly announce the important benchmarks for this project and they find an effective way to report their progress to the important stakeholders.

In conclusion I thank you for allowing the Thompson Chamber of Commerce to provide these thoughts to your commission. You are entrusted with very important decisions regarding this application. We hope you will be able to gain all the information required to make these decisions. **The Thompson Chamber of Commerce encourages the band, Manitoba Hydro board and you to support this project.**