

Rodney Spence

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**Presentation to the Clean Environment Commission  
(CEC) on the Proposed Wuskwatim Project (WP)**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Clean Environment Commission, my name is Rodney Spence. I am a member of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and I currently reside in Winnipeg. However, I have lived most of my life as a resident of Nelson House, with the exception of the past ten years in Winnipeg.

For many years, as a former Chief, I was deeply involved in activities concerning the negotiation and implementation of the Northern Flood Agreement. Over the past three weeks I have been at most of the

sessions of these Clean Environment Commission hearings on the Wuskwatim Project, and I have listened and observed carefully.

The environmental impact statement on Wuskwatim, that is being examined by the Clean Environment Commission is, in my understanding, an examination of the potential new environmental impacts of the Wuskwatim Project upon the land, lives and livelihood of the members of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and possibly other affected communities.

As you have heard at these hearings, the people of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation are understandably skeptical and hesitant about a new Hydro Project because of past changes caused by the development of the Churchill River Diversion in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

This skepticism is having a direct impact on the people in both home communities of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in Nelson House and South Indian Lake. People in these communities view the Wuskwatim development in different and sometimes opposite, ways. As a result, the elected leadership of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is being criticized from within the community and as well from the outside for their efforts to use the development of Wuskwatim as a positive resource for the present and future of the First Nation. This has created some tension and concern among our members but I believe, for the most part, this is representative of a heartfelt concern to understand the project's effects and to ensure that if it does go forward that it will be done correctly. They want the right thing for not just themselves but for their families their children and our people.

Some presenters at these hearings have expressed what, on the surface, seems like concern for the traditional livelihood of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. I heard a suggestion that our Cree way of life could still be the same today as it was in the past with its main source of livelihood being trapping, fishing and hunting.

Our Cree values and attachment to the land, water and traditions continue to be very important to us. But, the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, both our leadership and our members, recognize their traditional sources of livelihood can no longer meet the increasing and changing needs of a growing population and changing economy. We will always trap, hunt and fish as part of maintaining our culture, but we cannot expect our economy will be based on that. Unemployment and living conditions at both Nelson House and South Indian Lake are now at a

level that would not be tolerated by the citizens of other communities in southern Canada. Why should we? We must act to change this.

The leadership of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is trying to find ways to continue to use their traditional resources of land and water in ways that will benefit our people. They are trying to create a dependable, long-term source of revenue that they will own and control for the benefit of present and future generations.

Attacking the present leadership of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation for political gain by those within the First Nation, and by outside self-appointed experts on Cree Culture is not helping either our communities or the vast majority of concerned members of our First Nation.

Our Chief & Council have been elected in the same manner as other Chief & Councils have been over the years. They are recognized as our democratically elected leaders by Canada, Manitoba, other First Nations and National and Provincial First Nation organizations. They are carrying out the difficult task of negotiating a development agreement for Wuskwatim while at the same time administering the day-to-day affairs of the First Nation that includes health, education, welfare, policing – all of the things that by themselves are extremely demanding. They deserve our respect and support for their efforts.

Certainly all aspects of the Wuskwatim Development Agreement must be examined very closely and carefully in the light of long-term benefits, and to ensure continuing protection of our Treaty and Aboriginal Rights under the Constitution. The best agreement possible must be negotiated. If efforts for

negotiating an agreement are terminated prematurely, without our chief and council bringing the full package to our people, we will all lose. We cannot squander real, tangible options for bringing essential economic support to our people. It's good to question but we need real solutions and we need them today.

I realize it won't be easy, but I believe that the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is on the right path with this project and we should work together for the benefit of all our people. No one else will do this for us. I support the Chief and Council and I urge them and our members to continue to work for this project.

Thank You.

