

Clean Environment Commission

Statement of William Osborne, March 17, 2004

Good afternoon Commissioners. My name is William Osborne. I am a member of the Executive Council of Pimicikamak, with responsibility for Intergovernmental Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you something about our concerns.

We are not against development. We support sustainable development. But we do not support development that causes more damage to our lands and our lives. We believe that developers should find out and face up to the truth about what they are doing. Developers should do this, not in a hostile or adversarial way, but in an open and honest way.

Our experience is that Manitoba Hydro is destroying critical boreal ecosystems. It is destroying our place in the world. Our experience is that Manitoba Hydro has not told the truth about this in the past.

Even today, Manitoba Hydro does not honestly admit the damage it is causing. It even promotes its energy as clean, green and sustainable. For example, take a look at the big wall picture down Portage Avenue at St. James Street. This is a big lie. It is profoundly offensive and damaging to our people.

In hiding the damage that its project is doing, Manitoba Hydro also does very little to remedy that damage. In this way, our impoverished citizens subsidize cheap energy exports.

Our people are living today with a Manitoba Hydro project that a public inquiry -- a public inquiry that listened to the evidence and considered the facts -- described as "an ecological, social and moral catastrophe". We understand that Manitoba Hydro has grudgingly admitted that Wuskwatim promises more of the same - more of a catastrophe.

Manitoba Hydro says it will not be a lot more of a catastrophe, relative to what we are already experiencing. They say it will be "imperceptible". It would not surprise us if it is imperceptible to Manitoba Hydro, because our experience is that Manitoba Hydro does not want to know what it is doing.

We find Manitoba Hydro's assurances to be neither credible nor trustworthy. We are concerned that Manitoba Hydro may, once again, not be telling the truth.

However little or however much extra catastrophe Wuskwatim might cause, we should not have any increase in this catastrophe deliberately inflicted on us, especially while most of the promised remediation of existing impacts has not been done.

We understand that there are limits on what this Commission can do. We understand that the Manitoba government may have already decided to build Wuskwatim. However, we ask the Commission to uphold the integrity of its mandate.

The Pimicikamak people respectfully asks the Commission to tell the Manitoba government that the Commission cannot recommend with confidence any way to build and operate this dam that is consistent with effective environmental management.

Thank you.