

Good afternoon/good evening. My name is Thora Palson, Councillor here in Gimli. I am speaking today to represent the Rural Municipality of Gimli.

We understand that Lake Winnipeg is a key asset to the ongoing operations and success of Manitoba Hydro. Their corporate responsibility is to recognize that this is natural resource that belongs to all of us. Many economies rely on Lake Winnipeg, including personal and public investments and livelihoods. Our lake is a unique economic ecosystem.

Here in Gimli, being a community on the shores of Lake Winnipeg we see our shoreline eroding at an alarming rate. We see loss of personal property, public property, wildlife habitat and detrimental change to the lake's water quality. This affects our property values, our economy and our surroundings. We believe that by Manitoba Hydro continuing to maintain high lake levels it cannot allow our lake to perform its natural fluctuation and its filtration and therefore has become a direct cause of the loss of property, economy and habitat.

It is apparent that Manitoba Hydro continues to increase profit margins without regard to waterfront property owners, businesses that rely on tourism revenue, fishers who depend on a healthy lake for their livelihood, municipalities that must protect public assets and the wildlife that is losing its habitats. Many communities and citizens around Lake Winnipeg including the RM of Gimli have petitioned the Province of Manitoba to reduce the water levels as set by the Lake Winnipeg Regulations. Our hope is that by lowering water levels, shoreline erosion along the shores of the south basin of Lake Winnipeg can be minimized, and the health of the lake can be better maintained by its natural means.

It is our understanding that Manitoba Hydro has indicated that this is not a reasonable solution. Reducing lake levels would cause the corporation to lose millions of dollars in lost energy production, with little or no impact on erosion and health of Lake Winnipeg.

The RM of Gimli strongly disagrees with this assumption. We are witnessing with our own eyes erosion of shoreline, loss of habitat and the changing health of our lake.

Scientific research is not the only measure that tells us what is happening in our back yard. Long term personal observations are no less a measure of the problems that our municipality is facing. We can see how the shoreline has changed in our lifetimes. We can see the natural habitat that has been affected, and we see the change in the lake's water quality.

I believe that the citizens of Manitoba are fortunate to have a Crown Corporation providing a natural energy source. I know Manitoba Hydro makes great efforts to give back to the people of Manitoba, providing sponsorships, subsidizing First Nations communities that have been affected by land changes, and its revenues have contributed to provincial coffers to everyone's benefit.

My questions are;

Why is Manitoba Hydro not compensating property owners, businesses and municipalities that are losing assets and habitats from erosion due to high lake levels? Why is Manitoba Hydro not financially assisting in protecting assets?

How can Manitoba Hydro justify continuing this course of operation when it comes at the expense of the people, property and wildlife?

And finally, the Government of Manitoba Acts and Regulations set the rules for sustainable development of natural resources. Why do we as citizens of Manitoba feel that MB Hydro is not adhering to provisions for sustainable development as set by the province?