

## Public Notice

# Engagement and Consultation for Environmental Assessment and Impact Review Processes during the COVID-19 Pandemic August 13, 2020

### Summary

- The Review Board's statutory consultation responsibilities, commitment to meaningful engagement and consultation, and expectations for proponent engagement continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Approaches to engagement and consultation in Review Board proceedings may need to change and will be set on a case-by-case basis following engagement with the relevant parties.
- The Review Board will be ready to adapt its approaches as circumstances change.

### Introduction

This notice describes the Review Board's approach to engagement and consultation in environmental assessments and impact reviews while COVID-19 precautions are required.

### Engagement and consultation is a central part of the Review Board's work

The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board's (Review Board) is the primary body responsible for environmental assessment and impact review in the Mackenzie Valley. The Board's assessments and reviews center on the protection of the environment (including social, economic, and cultural aspects), the wellbeing of communities and residents in the Mackenzie Valley, the well-being and way of life of Indigenous Peoples, and the concerns of Indigenous people and the public.

As stated in the Review Board's [Interim Policy Statement on Engagement and Consultation in Environmental Assessment and Impact Review](#), the Board takes these responsibilities very seriously and recognizes the value of meaningful engagement and consultation.

## **Meaningful engagement and consultation is required during the COVID-19 pandemic, but different approaches may be needed to protect everyone's health and safety**

The Review Board's [March 18<sup>th</sup> Public Notice](#) announced that the Board offices are closed and staff are working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board recognizes that health and safety is the top priority and COVID-19 may make it difficult for people to participate effectively in environmental assessments and difficult for proponents to engage communities and Indigenous Government Organizations.

There are many challenges that communities, Indigenous Government Organizations, and others may be facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Every situation is different. To help understand the impact that the pandemic may be having, more specific engagement and communication with all parties to the Review Board's environmental assessment processes will be needed going forward.

**Proponent engagement** is a necessary and important part of the environmental assessment process in the Mackenzie Valley. It is **still required during the COVID-19 pandemic**.

During the pandemic, proponents should continue to:

- Contact the Review Board about expectations, who to engage, and how to get started.
- Contact communities and Indigenous Government Organizations to discuss appropriate engagement methods.

The Review Board also relies on in-person sessions and hearings, which may be restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **The Review Board's approach to engagement and consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Review Board's commitment to its responsibilities under the MVRMA, and its own policies, guidelines, and principles has not changed with COVID-19. The Review Board will continue to:

- Provide meaningful opportunities for affected parties to participate in environmental assessments and to communicate their views to the Board.
- Comply with the orders and guidelines set by the Chief Public Health Officer of the Northwest Territories and will not condone any activities that contravene those orders.
- Communicate in a clear, transparent, and timely manner with all parties.

For each environmental assessment, the Review Board will work with parties to set engagement and consultation approaches that are **safe** and **effective**. The Board will:

- **Discuss** any specific challenges, needs, and preferred engagement approaches with affected communities and Indigenous Government Organizations.
- **Develop and implement** detailed workplans that prioritize health and safety while making sure the environmental assessment process fits the project, the potential impacts, and the needs of affected parties.
- **Adapt** as circumstances change or in response to feedback from parties, to ensure engagement and consultation activities remain safe and effective.

The Board will respect legislated timelines, while ensuring meaningful engagement and statutory consultation requirements are met. As always, the Board will consider extensions for things like comment deadlines and document submissions on a case-by-case basis.

### **Protecting the health and safety of communities is paramount during this time**

The Board is committed to providing opportunities for meaningful participation in environmental assessments while protecting the health and safety of participants and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the items discussed in this public notice, please feel free to contact the Review Board's Executive Director, Mark Cliffe-Phillips, by email at [mcliffephillips@reviewboard.ca](mailto:mcliffephillips@reviewboard.ca) or by phone at (867) 766-7055.