



## Tłıchǫ Government

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### **Re: Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment in the Slave Geological Province**

Dear Joelle,

On June 4, 2021, Tłıchǫ Government (TG) wrote to the Minister of Northern Affairs to request a regional strategic environmental assessment (RSEA) of the Slave Geological Province (SGP) area of the Northwest Territories, using the “regional study” provision under Part 5.2 of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

In June 2022, TG participated in a workshop hosted by Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and MVEIRB to introduce the concept of RSEA and to start a conversation on what a potential RSEA in the SGP could look like. TG used the workshop as an opportunity to listen to questions and ideas from other governments and organizations, and to explain the TG request to others. We also offered to meet with any other government or organization who was interested after the workshop.

After the workshop, staff wrote to us to say that CIRNAC “*will be relying on workshop reflections and written submissions to help inform recommendations to the Minister of Northern Affairs on initiating a regional study under Part 5.2 of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, and potentially under the Nunavut Agreement.*” CIRNAC also invited us to consider several questions.

**1. First TG would like to reinforce and reemphasize everything we communicated in our [June 4, 2021 request to the Minister](#).**

- The urgency and importance of our request are still as true now as they were a year ago. If anything, the more time passes, the more pressing the issues become.

- TG stands fully behind our June 2021 request and looks forward to the Minister formally initiating the regional strategic assessment in the Slave Geological Province as soon as possible.

**2. We also shared important comments at the RSEA workshop, many of which are reflected in the Workshop Report and we expect that those will be carefully considered, in addition to our June 4, 2021 letter and this letter.**

### **3. CIRNAC's questions:**

CIRNAC's questions are in italics. Our responses are bulleted below.

*Your government's or organization's views on the need for or utility of an RSEA in the SGP*

- We have clearly stated TG's views in the June 4, 2021 letter.
- We recognize that the region has great value for Tłıchǫ cultural well-being, way of life, and caribou, AND the region has great value and potential for economic development. And we know that Permanent infrastructure will irreversibly change the region. Tłıchǫ Government believes that to reconcile these values and achieve balance, we need an independent assessment of options, impacts, and benefits, before permanent infrastructure is built. Please see our June 2021 letter for additional insights, including
  - the need for regional issues (like cumulative effects on migratory ekwo) to be looked at through regional approaches (like RSEA)
  - TG perspective on how project EA, land use planning, and other processes can be supported by and benefit from RSEA
- Even single development proposals such as the Ekati Point Lake and Jay Projects and the Sabina Back River Project have been seriously challenged by cumulative effects on caribou. Permanent infrastructure would be an entirely new and different kind of development in the Slave Geological Province. Combined with other past, present, and future developments across the region (many of which may be stimulated or directly enabled by infrastructure, which is a major reason why permanent infrastructure is being considered in the first place) this will seriously affect caribou, culture, and socioeconomics, fundamentally changing the region on a scale and in ways that go beyond what project-scale EA can address. A regional approach such as an RSEA is needed to address regional challenges.

*Your government's or organization's interest in participating in an RSEA;*

- Like the conclusion of our June 2021 letter says, this work is urgent and we are ready to move it forward. TG expects to play a leadership role in the RSEA, consistent with rights, responsibilities, and authorities set out in the Tłıchǫ Agreement.
- The decision and initiation of an RSEA, and the RSEA process will need to recognize diversity and the unique context in each territory, community, and IGO.

- We need to be clear that the RSEA will not make decisions about future development or in any way change existing governance structures. The RSEA is about providing information to everyone so it can be interpreted and used based on everyone's unique perspectives.
- Based on the workshop discussions, as well as bilateral meetings at the staff level with YKDFN, KIA, GNWT, and CIRNAC over the past year and a half, we believe there is a common objective of achieving balance amongst environmental, cultural, and economic factors to enhance and sustain overall well-being. Our hope is that we can all recognize that common objective and get going on the work of the RSEA without delay.

*Views on ideal timeline, process and outcomes;*

- **Timeline:** We said 2-3 years. Over a year has passed now since our request. The sooner we get started the better... because the sooner we can begin the analysis and then start benefitting from the results. If the RSEA starts right away we believe it could still be completed within a timeframe similar to what we originally envisioned.
- **Process:** As we stated in our June 2021 letter, we recommend that MVEIRB be tasked as the independent agency responsible for carrying out the RSEA, using a structure similar to an environmental impact review. The focus should be on evaluating different development scenarios for **how, when, and where** infrastructure and other major developments could be undertaken. Expert scientific, socioeconomic, and Traditional Knowledge should be used throughout.
  - Setting up the development Scenarios will need to consider location, type, and timing of infrastructure and other development, as well as other factors including:
    - caribou population and management (including harvesting levels)
    - climate change
    - social and economic factors (such as demand for critical minerals, and Indigenous communities' capacity to benefit from employment and other opportunities).
  - Evaluating the scenarios - to TG the priority impacts and benefits for the RSEA to evaluate are in 3 areas:
    - Caribou population health and ability to migrate/move freely through the caribou range
    - Culture and way of life, including harvesting
    - Employment and economic benefits

The rsea should stay focussed on these priority effects and look carefully at how different development scenarios (especially permanent infrastructure and related development) would influence these 3 areas.

- **Outcomes:** The analysis of development scenarios, based on best available knowledge and informed by collaborative discussions along the way, should shed light on **what the impacts and benefits look like for different scenarios, and identify limiting factors and gaps.** This is the outcome we are most interested in.
  - Based on this primary outcome, the RSEA may also result in recommendations about ways to achieve balance going forward.
  - After the RSEA, each government/organization can then interpret and use the RSEA outcomes based on their own perspectives and priorities. This will inform conversations, decisions, planning, and actions for infrastructure and other future development in the region.

#### *Governance structure;*

- Please see the text above, under *Your government's or organization's interest in participating in an RSEA.*
- One other point we would like to make is that equitable does not necessarily mean "the same". Our view is that everyone who is interested or has information to contribute should participate in the RSEA. It should be open, inclusive, and transparent. In addition, there may be a smaller steering committee composed of Indigenous Governments/Organizations with land and resource management rights in the region.

#### *Geographical scope;*

- When TG requested the RSEA we did not specify whether it should include Nunavut or not – we made the request using a section of the MVRMA, which applies only in the NWT. Our focus is on the Mqwhì Gogha Dè Njttlèè area, which is partly in Nunavut but mostly within the NWT. At the same time our main concern is the health of ekwo and the ability for ekwo to migrate freely throughout its habitat/range.
- Our view is that, one way or another, the health of the migratory caribou herds and potential impacts throughout their range will need to be considered in any RSEA in the Slave Geological Province.
- We leave questions about the extent to which Nunavut may be included in the RSEA primarily to KIA and organizations from Nunavut.

#### **Conclusion and moving forward**

When considering our ultimate goal – achieving balance to enhance and sustain the well-being of Tłı̨chǫ Citizens, we look back on the vision of our past Tłı̨chǫ Chiefs and Elders. Chief Jimmy Bruneau (born in 1881 and became Chief in 1936) pushed to have a school established for Tłı̨chǫ children on Tłı̨chǫ land, so Tłı̨chǫ children would “learn both ways” – Tłı̨chǫ culture and way of life, as well as the modern economy. Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie explained this idea as being strong like two people.

Finally, we understand there is always time pressure and some parties may have concerns about delaying development by doing an RSEA. We also have concerns, great concerns about the future of this region and the well-being of our people. We have **not** proposed the RSEA to stop development, we have proposed it as a **proactive approach** to help find a positive path forward for the region, to avoid serious impacts and maximize benefits. This work could have been done years ago, but it was not. It needs to be done now and it needs to be done in a collaborative way.

In Tłıchq̓ unity,



Brett Wheler  
A/Director, Department of Culture and Lands Protection  
Tłıchq̓ Government

- cc. We understand that CIRNAC and MVEIRB will be sharing this letter with all governments and organizations that participated in the RSEA workshop.