

Memorandum

Prepared for: Deninu Kue First Nation **Date:** August 5, 2022

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Re: Slave Geological Province – Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment **Project:** EA4344

This memorandum is in response to the workshop hosted by the Mackenzie Valley Review Board on the concept of a Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) for the Slave Geological Province (SGP). The workshop was held at the Tree of Peace Centre in Yellowknife on June 22-23, 2022, and a subsequent summary report was released on July 13, 2022.

A Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) is similar to a regional land use planning exercise and/or a cumulative effects assessment, where a desired outcome for a region is identified in advance of specific development or changes occurring. This process is intended to ensure that future planning and/or development within a region occurs within the context of desirable outcomes by effectively managing the potential sources of future change, rather than the symptoms of change when they occur. Ultimately, an RSEA should facilitate the protection of ecological and cultural integrity, the building of sustainable communities (including social and economic dimensions), and responsible economic development within a sound environmental management framework.

Below is additional information and recommendations in response to questions posed by the workshop organisers.

Q1. Your government's or organization's views on the need for or utility of an RSEA in the SGP

An RSEA can be an effective tool to ensure sensible land use planning decisions are made that are in the best interest of all land users. But in this regard, an RSEA must be an ongoing initiative that remains updated on a regular basis to proactively adapt to the everchanging dynamics of natural and socio-economic systems.

It must also be acknowledged that most regions are currently experiencing local and cumulative effects from past and/or current development, changing policies and priorities and climate change. These existing or legacy effects must be considered when determine desired outcomes. As such, an RSEA for the SGP would be different in that it would occur in an area where major developments (e.g., diamond mines) are already in place with additional developments (e.g., Slave Geological Province Corridor) in the planning process. The primary objective of the RSEA would be to assess the cumulative impacts of past, present and future development in a way that is inclusive of Indigenous knowledge and science. A key challenge from the start would be to determine how cumulative effects of the pre-existing developments, and natural changes to the environment (e.g., forest fires, climate change)

combine to influence the current state of the ecosystem, and how these cumulative effects will progress in the future. Factors that contribute to this challenge include:

- Gaps in availability of monitoring data;
- A range of views on appropriate baselines;
- The range of activities contributing to numerous types of human-induced changes in the environment; and
- The dynamic and complex environment of the SGP that is challenging to conclusively understand.

Despite these challenges, the first step in better management of cumulative effects in the region is to identify priority values that can be related to culture, social, economic, environment and/or governance. The RSEA must take a holistic approach to understand the activities and impact pathways that are affecting these values with the ultimate focus on conservation, protection and management of values and the Indigenous ways of life that depend on these values.

Q2. Your government's or organization's interest in participating in an RSEA

I recommend the Deninu Kue First Nation (DKFN) be supportive of and participate in an RSEA for the SGP. Although, the level of commitment and participation must be identified in a terms of reference. Likewise, capacity funding for participation must also be included.

Q3. Views on ideal timeline, process and outcomes

The RSEA process should address broad goals and objectives, led by a set of guiding principle (all of which need to be developed). These should lead to a proactive strategy that identifies management actions to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved. An early focus of the RSEA should be to identify which values warrant greater attention.

The time for initiating an RSEA in the SGP is past due; therefore, should this initiative occur, it should be implemented immediately. Any kind of process would have to be inclusive of all parties with an interest in the SGP. Obviously, this includes Indigenous groups, but government agencies and developers should also be included. Outcomes would be determined by the parties involved, but ultimately wise decisions should be made on how the SGP is managed now and into the future.

Q4. Governance structure

An RSEA for the SGP has to be multi-faceted with the recognition that many parties including different Indigenous governments and communities, federal, provincial and territorial governments, industry from different sectors, ENGOs, and academic researchers have important roles to play and well as a broad range of interests.

Within the SGP, certain economic development and land management objectives have been identified. The RSEA cannot alter these past decisions and will likely not have the legal basis to change government policies or approvals. Although, the outcomes of the RSEA can be used for collaborative planning processes and other discussions going forward.

An RSEA for the SGP would require a champion or coordinator to guide the exercise through the process. All parties with an interest in the SGP, including the DKFN, can be part of a working group to oversee the preparation of a terms of reference for the RSEA and to then ensure the terms of reference is followed.

It would need to be determined if this working group is a decision-making body or if it would only provide recommendations to the land use regulators. In any event, part of the governance structure will have to include local Chiefs and Councils to ensure any actions and outcomes recommended by the working group have also received support at the community level.

Q5. Geographical scope

While the SGP is geographically contained within a spatial area, the users of this area are not confined to it. For example, residents of Fort Resolution (which is not within the boundaries of the SGP) have and will continue to utilize the natural resources within the SGP. These actions influence the socio-economic dynamics within the community. The RSEA must recognize these complex interactions especially where cumulative effects are concerned.

Any other matters of importance for your government or organization

The RSEA should considered all pressures on the environments, development or otherwise, and not only those that undergo project-level environmental assessments. The assessment has to be considerate of actions and activities that do not trigger EA legislation, such as land use permit and water licensing, exploration programs, and abandoned site clean-up activities.

Based on the comments provided herein regarding the current situation in the SGP, perhaps a better approach than trying to develop a Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment is to develop a Regional Cumulative Effects Management Program for the SGP. Here the focus could be on addressing the current symptoms on the ground (e.g., declining caribou herds), and then strategically managing the drivers of these symptoms. In any event, priorities need to be established and agreed upon by interested parties.

Finally, an RSEA has to be inclusive of all sectors of Indigenous culture, from Elders to youth, to assist in facilitating the transfer of knowledge across generations.