

Land and Water Boards of the Mackenzie Valley

November 30, 2021

The Honourable Daniel Vandal, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Northern Affairs
Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, North Tower
Hull, Québec K1A 0H4

Sent via email

Dear Minister Vandal,

RE: Northern Participant Funding Program – Request for Expansion

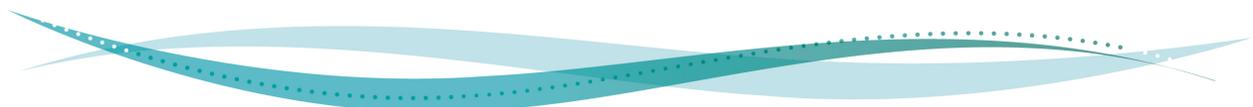
The Land and Water Boards of the Mackenzie Valley, or the Boards (Gwich'in, Mackenzie Valley, Sahtu, and Wek'èezhii Land and Water Boards) are writing you to request that the Northern Participant Funding Program (NPPF) be expanded to include the Boards' regulatory processes.

The importance of the NPPF, which supports effective public participation in impact assessments undertaken by the Mackenzie Valley Review Board, was highlighted in the [2020 Northwest Territories Environmental Audit](#) (2020 Audit). To illustrate, the Audit Team found:

“CIRNAC's recent deployment of the Northern Participant Funding Program (NPPF), which aims to provide capacity funding for impact assessment review of major projects, to be a timely and new addition since the 2015 Audit. In our conversations with the MVEIRB staff and Indigenous organizations, the introduction of NPPF was found to be a ground-breaking improvement. We are encouraged by this progress; however, there remain gaps in participant funding for other regulatory processes (e.g., licensing and permitting).”

The Boards have long acknowledged the need for participant funding, which is a federal responsibility. Parties to the Boards' proceedings have also asked for this critical funding. For example, during the environmental assessment for Diavik Diamond Mines Inc.'s proposal to deposit kimberlite into pits and underground, parties raised the issue about the need for funding following the environmental assessment phase. The Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation stated in its closing arguments that, “Funding should be made available for affected Indigenous governments and organizations to participate in the water licence and land use permit phase of the regulatory process in order to allow Indigenous parties [to] meaningfully participate in the entire regulatory process”.

It is also important to note that an exceptionally small number of proposed developments are referred to the Review Board for an environmental assessment or environment impact review. The vast majority of proceedings that occur in the Mackenzie Valley are conducted by the Land and Water Boards. For example, in 2020, the Boards processed 17 water licences and 39 land use permits (including five public hearings), as well as multiple management plans, all of which required the valuable input of Indigenous Governments and Organizations and other Northerners.



Land and Water Boards of the Mackenzie Valley

According to the 2020 Audit, "CIRNAC is actively seeking feedback from its partners on what needs this [Northern Participant Funding] program does and does not meet, and may revise the program's design when it is up for renewal in 2022-2023". For the reasons outlined above, the Boards are respectfully requesting that CIRNAC consider expanding the NFPF during its upcoming renewal. While we acknowledge that under the initial Treasury Board approval the NFPF was only set up to cover impact assessments of major projects, we would also like to point out that the Boards carry out the first level of environmental impact assessment in the Mackenzie Valley; that is, preliminary screening. Major projects can be screened by the Boards and go directly to licensing and permitting without being referred to environmental assessment.

Should you wish to discuss this further with the Boards, please contact Shelagh Montgomery at smontgomery@mvlwb.com or (867) 766-7457.

Sincerely,

Mavis Cli-Michaud
Chair
Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board

Mason Mantla
A/Chair
Wek'èzhii Land and Water Board

Elizabeth Wright
Chair
Gwich'in Land and Water Board

Tanya T. MacIntosh
Chair
Sahtu Land and Water Board

Copied to: Daniel Quan-Watson, Deputy Minister, CIRNAC
Serge Beaudoin, Assistant Deputy Minister, CIRNAC
Joanna Ankersmit, Director General, Natural Resources and Environment Branch
Northern Affairs Organization, CIRNAC
Kim Pawley, Manager – Environmental Assessment, Land Use Planning and Conservation,
CIRNAC

