



INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AGENCY

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February 14th, 2005.

Renita Schuh
Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board
Box 938
5102-50th Avenue
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N7

Dear Renita,

The Independent Environmental Monitoring Agency (IEMA) thanks you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft TEK Guidelines produced by your office on November 2004. We commend the Board for its positive initiative in developing these guidelines, and look forward to seeing the finalized document.

In general, we believe that the Guidelines are satisfactory. This document will help raise the profile of TEK in EIA and will give formal direction to developers in incorporating TEK into their baseline studies and Environmental Impact Statements. Ultimately, these Guidelines should help realize the goal of improving the analysis and decision-making in environmental impact assessment.

We include the following suggestions for your consideration. These suggestions are meant to add context to the ideas and principles expressed in the document.

- P. 6, 3rd bullet: We suggest inserting "...periods substantially longer than scientific baseline data can draw from (2-5 years in most EIA studies)..". This comparison to science gives context to the reason for TK's value in baseline studies.
- P. 6, NEW BULLET: "The holistic approach of TK can identify links between seemingly unrelated components of the environment. These links are often not well understood or even recognized by science." The relationship between often-disparate elements of the environment that aboriginal people know of can be very informative in preliminary screenings and EI assessments. For example, TK may identify a link in certain years between poor physical condition of caribou in summer and increased recruitment of young-of-the-year trout. The link could be an increased abundance of larval mosquitos and black flies that are (a) consumed by juvenile trout and (b) develop into biting adults which swarm caribou.
- P. 8, last paragraph: We suggest inserting, "Proponents are advised to explain at the outset how TK is to be used by the developer. This is necessary to (a) uphold the



principle of prior Informed Consent, and (b) develop trust in the individual or group soliciting the TK.” Consultants and academics from outside a community have sometimes been known to err in their introductions to community residents. That is, it is not enough to tell TK-holders what TK subject matter is being sought and who will be using it. It is also necessary to explain why their knowledge is needed and what role their TK will play in final outcomes of a project or EIA.

- P. 11, between the last 2 paragraphs of Section 6: We suggest wording to the effect “There is often a large difference among regulators, proponents and Aboriginal peoples in their perceptions as to whether an identified impact is significant or insignificant. An understanding of an Aboriginal peoples’ TK can enlighten regulators and proponents in disagreements with aboriginal groups regarding the assignment of level of significance on individual impacts.” For example, in the perspective of biologists, an industrial release of a toxic substance into an area may affect too small a subset of an animal population to have a significant adverse impact on that animal population as a whole. However, an aboriginal community may assign the same toxic release a highly significant adverse impact to the health of the community that harvests from that subset of animals.
- P. 13, 3rd paragraph of Section 7.5: It is often considered by Aboriginal people to be inappropriate to question or challenge an elder's statements, especially in such an open forum as a public hearing. The Board would be wise to address this difficult challenge in these Guidelines, which would also inform the “Rules of Procedure for Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Review Proceedings”, item (y).
- P. 13, last paragraph: We suggest inserting somewhere in the paragraph the following idea: “If delivered by an aboriginal group or academic, that it was peer-reviewed in the aboriginal community; if delivered by the proponent, that it was collected with appropriate community-specific protocols and approved for use by the appropriate community organization or leadership.” The key point here is that, for it to be effective and useful, the TK being provided must first be authenticated.

Minor grammatical/spelling errors:

P. 8, last paragraph: Remove the apostrophe in “Developer’s”.

Sincerely,

-ORIGINAL SIGNED BY-

William A. Ross, Chairperson

Cc: Society Members