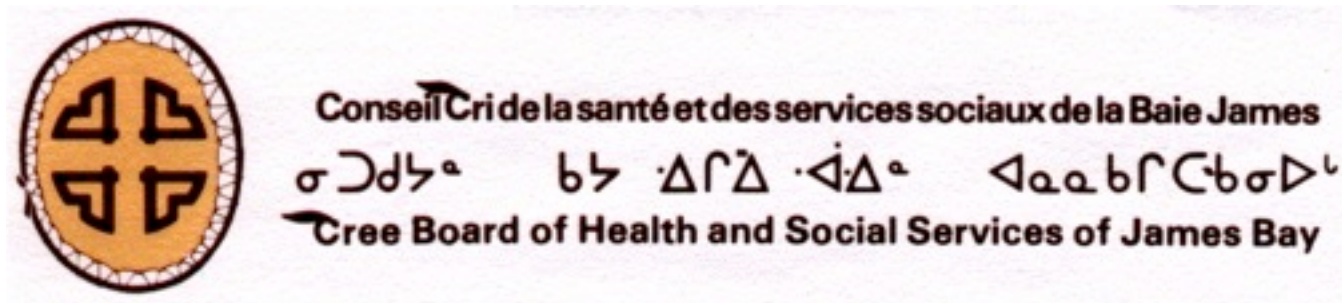


Matoush Project: Determining the health and social impacts



Public Health Department

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Presentation submitted to the hearing

Outline

Today we are not discussing the specific Matoush project which has already been covered by other presentations during this hearing.

Instead, I want to focus on what would be an appropriate process for determining the potential impacts on human health from a project like this.

Section 1: Context and history

- We, the Eeyouch of Northern Quebec, have used this land and its resources in a productive and sustainable way from time immemorial.
- Unlike the rest of Québec, we are a rapidly growing population and this will continue into the future.
- We are dealing with issues of low levels of education and high unemployment, especially among youth, which in turn link to poverty and social and health issues.
- However, being Eeyouch in Eeyou Istchee provides us with many protective factors and its from here we find out strength as families, communities and the Nation.

Cree trapline boundaries and the JBNQA

For Eeyouch, spending time out on the land hunting, fishing and living in bush camps is a way to well-being



I would like to read something said by a Cree during the Opinaca mines consultation in 2010:

This person raised a few questions which I believe are useful to restate today:

“According to the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the development should be compatible with the Cree way of life. Our experience of development until today has not been as good as we hoped. The last experience is what we have to relate to, but it was not good enough and you will have to do much better. Can you ensure that this project will be compatible with the Cree way of life? How will you do that? And what is the company planning to make sure it will be acceptable?”

Section 2: Potential impact on human health

Now I want to turn to look at the potential impact on human health from large scale development projects.

We all know that

- some will benefit from positive impacts and
- others will suffer harm from negative impacts

Therefore, our **goal must be** to:

- Maximize potential health and social benefits,
- Minimize potential harms, and
- Ensure that the distribution of benefits and harms within and between populations is fair

What, in general, are the health impacts of development projects?

From other development projects on the lands of Aboriginal peoples in the sub-Arctic, we know that:

- the actual impacts on employment are small but often have unexpected negative impacts
- Projects are often associated with an increase in social and health problems in small communities
- Health and social services often become overwhelmed

Section 3: Improving how we move forward

- Environmental (and Social) Impact Assessment processes do not sufficiently identify nor effectively address important health and social impacts relating to economic development
- Past experience in the region has shown that the consideration of health and social impacts as part of this process has been very weak at best and at times non-existent
- It is therefore necessary to put in place a more effective process for examining the potential health and social impacts of economic development projects in a more explicit, comprehensive and systematic way

How can this be done?

- We propose the following approach:
 - STEP 1: List all who could be affected
 - STEP 2: Determine potential impacts
 - STEP 3: Make recommendations

STEP 1: Whose health and social well-being will be affected?

- Examples of groups who will potentially be affected by the proposed development project:
 - Eeyou workers working on development projects
 - Eeyou workers employed by spin-off businesses
 - The families of Eeyou workers
 - Hunters and their families who use land near the project
 - Communities downstream from project sites
 - Providers of health and social services
 - The entire Cree Nation
 - The animals, the fish, the land and the water
 - Other populations

STEP 2: What are the likely health and social impacts for each group?

- For each group we need to answer:
 - a. How will the project impact the factors determining their health and social well-being?
 - b. What will be the impact of this on individual and community health and well-being?
 - c. Will this lead to benefit or harm?

a) The factors determining health and well-being and influenced by the proposed development project are:

- **Lifestyle factors**

- Diet, exercise, engaging in safe behaviours (at work, at home and at play), absence of harmful behaviours (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling), etc.

- **Physical environment**

- Air, water, land, food, housing, etc.

- **Social environment including culture and identity**

- Income and education, employment and working conditions, social support and social cohesion, early childhood development, gender, self-determination, traditional way of life, etc.

- **Health and social services**

- Availability, accessibility, quality, effectiveness, efficacy

b) The economic development project may have an impact on:

- Physical health (e.g. mortality, disease, disability, quality of life, etc.)
- Mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression, violence, substance abuse, etc.)
- Social health (e.g. community cohesion, social support systems, etc.)
- Spiritual health (e.g. traditional way of life, relation to the land, etc.)
- **It may also result in greater health inequalities**
 - Within the population
 - Between the population and Quebec overall

c) Finally we need to assess if the benefits to an individual or group outweigh the potential harms.

Examples of benefits are:

- Improved health, greater prosperity, increased social support, fewer health and social inequities, etc.

Examples of harms are:

- Poor health, increased social stressors, deteriorated sense of well-being, unable to follow traditional way of life, growing health and social inequities, contaminated environment, disturbance and/or desecration of sacred sites, etc.

STEP 3: Make recommendations to maximize benefits and minimize harm

- Each group has to be assessed for its potential benefits and risks/harms.
- Then an overall assessment of this has to be done for each community, the Cree Nation and Eeyou Istchee.
- We have outlined this in more detail in the presentation we are submitting.

We must continue to ask: Who will bear the human costs of economic development in the North?

- The Northern populations are already at a disadvantage due to their remote location and suffer considerable health and social inequities as compared to the rest of Quebec.
- Profiting from the natural resources and tourism potential in the North at the expense of these Northern populations would be unjust, further increasing inequities rather than helping those who need it most.

We must continue to ask: Can health and social services cope with the increased demand?

- The institutions created through the provisions of the JBNQA, such as the Cree Board of Health, have to be examined to see if their mandate and jurisdiction need to be redefined and whether resources available will be adequate to do the additional work that will likely arise from health, social and public health challenges relating to new and ongoing development projects in the North.

Conclusion

It is important to minimize the potential risks and maximize the benefits for the Cree communities as a whole.

The decision for the Cree Nation is therefore not whether there will be an impact – there will be – but will the impact from this project for this generation and for future generations be sufficiently counterbalanced by the benefits to make this worthwhile?