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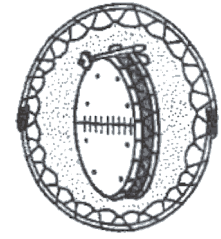
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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)

Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

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CREE REGIONAL AUTHORITY  
ADMINISTRATION RÉGIONALE CRIE



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December 5, 2005

Ms. Marcela Orozco, JPAC Liaison Officer  
The Commission for Environmental Cooperation  
393 St-Jacques Street West  
Suite 200  
Montréal, Québec  
H2Y 1N9

Subject: *'Our future within the CEC' – Strategic Plan of the Joint Public Advisory Committee, 2006-2010. Comments submitted by the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Regional Authority.*

Dear Ms Orozco,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and the Cree Regional Authority (Northern Québec, Canada) in response to the 'Strategic Plan of the Joint Public Advisory Committee 2006-2010' which was released for comment in November, 2005.

These two organizations represent a group of nine Cree First Nations or Tribes in a region of the boreal forest of Northern Québec (Canada) better known as the James Bay Territory, but known to us as Eeyou Istchee – The People's Land. This is a region which has been opened up to a very large hydro-electric development in the last thirty years, as well as to forestry and mining. The Cree communities, with their cultural roots in a northern forest hunting economy, are facing the experience of a rapidly changing environment and economy as the northern development frontier moves advances through the James Bay territory.

We are sending this letter to express our support for the role of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) in its work towards the implementation of the NAAEC and the work

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of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.

We have two main messages for JPAC. The first is that we are concerned (and we believe that we share this concern with many other public interest organizations) about the 'sustainability' of NAAEC and even of the CEC, and believe that the concept as a whole needs renewal and fresh commitment on the part of the three signatory governments – Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The second message is that we are obviously sympathetic to the need to involve Indigenous peoples from the three countries in the NAAEC exercise as a whole and in the CEC – coordinated programmes in particular. We recognized that this has not been a particularly successful part of the CEC programme in the past and note, with disappointment, that despite JPAC's very specific Advice to Council on this matter and public statements of interest from the Secretariat, promoting the involvement of Indigenous peoples is still on the JPAC agenda for the coming five years.

We will deal here first with the larger problem of the commitments of governments to the NAAEC and the CEC, and the role of JPAC. Most (although not all) of our experience with the CEC has been with the Sound Management of Chemicals Programme (SMOC). Specifically, our organization has been involved in the North American Regional Action Plan (NARAP) development and implementation process for mercury, dioxins/furans and hexachlorobenzene, as well as (and perhaps most important) the Monitoring and Assessment NARAP.

There is growing concern about the future of these NARAPs and of the SMOC agenda in general, and the extent to which the participating governments are prepared to see the NARAP's as documents which can assist directly in the development and public discussion of policy towards environmental contaminants and human exposure to those contaminants. We are afraid that it is simply not obvious that governments are prepared to take the CEC and the SMOC initiatives seriously and weave them into other international agreements and commitments towards environmental contamination. We see the decision last year to withdraw from further work on children's health and the environment as a convincing illustration of the basis for our concern.

Against this background, you may be assured that we will support any initiatives which the JPAC is prepared to take to strengthen the visibility of the CEC initiatives at the government level and to keep alive (and relevant) the development of environmental policy towards contaminants within the NAAEC framework. It is very much a matter of capacity development (as well as commitment), in all three jurisdictions.

On the second point, that of the engagement and participation of Indigenous peoples, we have the following comments and suggestions to offer.

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have the following comments and suggestions to offer.

The involvement of First Nations and other Aboriginal peoples in Canada in NAAEC/CEC activities depends on the creation – with their collaboration – of agendas and programmes which are seen as relevant to them. A narrow focus on a restricted range of industrial chemicals which are unfamiliar to these constituencies will not do the job. There is a need to sit down and identify those substances or classes of contaminants which prompt questions and discussion about exposure and health risks in First Nations and Aboriginal communities. There also has to be a sense that government is listening – and that the work (for example) of the Task Forces recruited to develop the NARAP's really is relevant to domestic (national) environmental policy and the coordination of initiatives across national boundaries.

The Monitoring and Assessment NARAP seemed, at the outset, to be a promising move in that direction, but it is much less clear to us now that there is enough interest and commitment at a national level to keep this initiative alive. We want this process to survive, and encourage JPAC to pursue this objective.

If we, at the Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority, can help to promote or strengthen the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the work of the JPAC directly or CEC initiatives in general, we are ready to do us. We encourage you to keep in touch with our organization and advise us if you need our support or advice.

Yours truly,

  
Matthew Mukash  
Grand Chief / Chairman

cc: The Honorable Stephane Dion  
W.V. Kennedy (CEC)  
A. Iserhoff, Deputy Grand Chief GCC  
W. Iserhoff, Director of Traditional Pursuits  
A. Penn, Science Advisor