

From: Minister, ENV ENV:EX <ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca>
Sent: December 7, 2021 8:48 AM
To: 'pat@northwestinstitute.ca' <pat@northwestinstitute.ca>
Cc: Deputy Minister ENV:EX <DM.ENV@gov.bc.ca>; Arend, Elenore EAO:EX <Elenore.Arend@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: RE: Letter for Minister

Reference: 383019

December 7, 2021

Pat Moss, Executive Director
and Co-Signers
Northwest Institute for Bioregional Research

Email: pat@northwestinstitute.ca

Dear Pat and Co-signers:

Thank you for your letter of October 15, 2021, regarding B.C.'s commitment to the environmental assessment process. I apologize for the delay in responding.

Maintaining and enhancing public confidence in environmental assessment continues to be a priority for our government and the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO). The 2018 Environmental Assessment Revitalization Intentions Paper outlined a suite of public engagement enhancements—some have been implemented and others are being developed. When the *Environmental Assessment Act* (2018) (the Act) came into force in 2019, the main focus for the EAO was to ensure that the necessary regulations and policies were in place to support the successful implementation of the Act, prioritizing efforts for engaging with Indigenous nations, the new Early Engagement phase and new Community Advisory Committees.

The environmental assessment process includes opportunities for stakeholders and the public to participate, provide input, and be informed about proposed and certified projects, recommendations, decisions, consultation and communication. While there is not currently a program for public participation funding, I understand that the EAO remains committed to engaging on options for public participant funding, as outlined in the Intentions Paper. Further details of future engagement will be provided when they are available. Funding for members of the Community Advisory Committee continues to be available, as per Section 22(2) of the Act.

The intention is to apply public participant funding in the future to projects being assessed under the Act. Public participant funding will not be available for projects being assessed under the former *Environmental Assessment Act* (2002). Rigorous public engagement is being undertaken on these projects and I understand that project teams continue to be available to meet with community groups to discuss their specific questions and concerns regarding the proposed Telkwa project.

The Community Advisory Committee Guidelines establish a process by which the level of interest of the community can be understood, starting in Early Engagement, to inform the establishment of a Community Advisory Committee during Process Planning. A digital subscription service is the minimum starting point for any Community Advisory Committee and is used to identify the level of community interest. Further engagement methods are then developed as appropriate.

For any project where there is community interest in a Community Advisory Committee, I expect, and have indicated that our intention is, that one would be established and that engagement by the EAO would be commensurate with the level of community interest. For example, if a project has no interest expressed in the Community Advisory Committee, the subscription service could still be established for anyone who chooses to sign up. Alternatively, if community members are interested in enhanced participation on a project, the subscription services—in addition to tailored engagement throughout the environmental assessment—would be established for the Committee.

To date, only one project has advanced to Process Planning, under the Act, and has established a Community Advisory Committee. In this case, the Committee has had the digital subscription service as well as six additional meetings of Community Advisory Committee Members and EAO staff to date. The Community Advisory Committee is an important tool for gaining relevant information to inform an environmental assessment and to share information with a community. The goal is to enable the Committee to be as effective as possible based on the level of community interest for each environmental assessment.

I have previously directed the EAO to evaluate the effectiveness of the Community Advisory Committee Guidelines, and I understand that this work is underway. Your comments regarding the committee have been shared and will be considered for any potential future updates. I understand that further engagement is contemplated by the EAO in 2022 to inform this work as well as further public engagement updates. The EAO will be reaching out to key stakeholders, including yourself, to seek feedback.

If you would like to discuss future work related to public engagement and the Community Advisory Committee, please contact Julie Chace, Executive Director, Strategic Services and Compliance Division, at Julie.Chace@gov.bc.ca or 778-698-7289, or Lindsay Luke, Director of Policy and Legislation, at Lindsay.Luke@gov.bc.ca or 250-698-9308.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,

George Heyman
Minister

cc: Kevin Jardine, Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
Elenore Arend, Associate Deputy Minister and Chief Executive Assessment Officer