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URANIUM INDUSTRY ISSUES IN QUEBEC

Public hearings

By the James Bay Advisory Committee on the Environment (JBACE)
and the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE)

STATEMENT OF CHIEF RICHARD SHECAPIO

Mistissini
June 5th, 2014

Community Members, BAPE representatives,

[intro words in Cree]

Monsieur Francoeur, Madame Goyer, Monsieur Zayed, je vous souhaite la bienvenue à Mistissini. Votre présence est appréciée et nous permet de vous démontrer qu'il n'y a pas d'acceptabilité sociale pour le développement d'uranium. En tant que défenseurs du plus grand lac d'eau douce au Québec, le lac Mistassini, nous nous opposons vivement à l'exploitation de l'uranium. Cela irait à l'encontre de notre mode de vie et de nos valeurs. Nous sommes réunis ici, aujourd'hui, pour proclamer haut et fort que l'uranium ne devrait pas être exploité à Mistissini, sur Eeyou Itschee ou au Québec.

I also would like to welcome members of the James Bay Advisory Committee on the Environment: John Paul Murdoch, Mélissa Brousseau Saganash, Manon Cyr and Anne-Marie Gaudet.

We commend the BAPE for collaborating with JBACE in organizing hearings in Eeyou Itschee, in Chisasibi two days ago and in Mistissini today. Considering the experience our community has had in evaluating the potential impacts and benefits from uranium development with Strateco's Matoush advanced uranium exploration project, the Cree Nation of Mistissini has an important role in providing the other Cree communities as well as the province of Quebec with some of the first-hand insights it has had throughout the years from its study of uranium's social, economic and environmental risks.



It is timely that the BAPE would be mandated to provide the province with an opportunity to express its stand on uranium, as we consider that there are great risks and uncertain rewards for all communities located in the vicinity of exploration and mining projects. As opposed to tailings from other types of mines, waste from uranium mine stays radioactive for thousands of years and that is socially unacceptable.

The Crees of Mistissini have demonstrated our belief in mining as one of the pathways to ensuring the economic vitality of our community and region. We are not opposed to mining development; we welcome and support responsible mining projects that have demonstrated a strong potential for creating quality jobs and ensuring sound management of its environmental impacts. Several of our community members are available and trained for mining work, and mining has become one of the key pillars of our economic development strategy.

Preparations for the hearings by the provincial and federal review boards under the JBNQA and by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) from 2010 to 2012 on the Matoush project have brought our women, men, leaders, elders, youth and trappers to take a very close look at the potential impacts from uranium mining. Throughout this period Mistissini was also active in providing its community members opportunities to participate in a dialogue with experts regarding issues related to uranium mining. We organized discussions, meetings and events to ensure that Mistissini had the internal discussion that was required to determine whether the Matoush project was compliant with community aspirations and values.

After polling our community on its perspective on uranium mining, Mistissini came to the conclusion that it was not something we could support without compromising our values and approaches to sound resource development and land-use planning. In the end, the public consultations provided us with a platform for expressing our position regarding uranium development on Mistissini traditional territory.

The Council of the Cree Nation of Mistissini and its members collectively presented the rationale for our refusal of the project. First, we are concerned with potential impacts on our culture from contamination of plants, water and traditional foods. We consider that the health risks and environmental risks from uranium mining, especially relating to air and water contamination from the waste rock and tailings, which would be stored on our land, are too great and not well understood. Second, any workers, be they Cree or otherwise, would be exposed to a level of radiation that could pose a considerable risk for their health and safety.

Also, we observed that uranium mining was incompatible with other key elements of our development strategy, among them the creation of a sustainable tourism sector. This development would rely on the preservation of Lake Mistissini, the largest freshwater lake in the province, and the creation of the Abanel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park, the largest inhabited national park. Generally, we found that the project was not socially acceptable to our community. The emergence of like-minded positions in



other communities, among them Chisasibi, who passed a resolution supporting Mistissini, eventually brought the Cree Nation Government to adopt a resolution calling for permanent uranium moratorium development at its general assembly, in 2012.

My people also understand that this project could be the first of many, as the Otish Mountains, which are located on traditional Cree traplines and feed the watersheds that connect most Cree communities, represent one of the richest uranium ore deposits in Canada. Any spill or leaching from uranium tailings in these mountains could potentially spread contamination through vast areas of the Cree Territory and Lac St-Jean region. This only increased the onus for us to prevent this development from occurring, as the cumulative impacts from many projects could eventually prevent us from harvesting uncontaminated traditional foods from our lands, which represents the core of our economy and culture.

As the Cree way of life and economy is still reliant on abundant and healthy animals and plants from an uncompromised environment, we must actively protect these lands. Our community's freedom to live off the land is the cornerstone of our culture, and our priority as a Nation will be to ensure that we can share this freedom with coming generations.

This challenge is compounded by the fact that many of the great river systems in Eeyou Istchee have already been harnessed by large-scale hydroelectric dam projects. Our deep knowledge of ecological processes gives us the great responsibilities of protecting the land and its watershed, which include the health of Lake Mistissini. It is our duty as stewards of the land.

We have yet to be convinced that corporate administrations can genuinely commit to the long-term management of mining waste that will remain radioactive for thousands of years. Even the best security mechanisms will eventually fail.

The recent floods along the Temscamie River have provided a striking image of the potentially devastating impacts from increasingly unpredictable weather events. Climate change will only add to the risks inherent to uranium tailings management.

The Cree Nation of Mistissini is here today to make sure that the province understands why we have refused uranium development on our land, and we appreciate the fact that the BAPE and the JBACE has provided the platform to express our priorities and vision, which does not include uranium mining. Development on our traditional territory will never occur without our consent.

While we regret that the background documents produced by the BAPE have yet to be provided to us in English or Cree, we intend to remain closely involved in the BAPE process, in the hope that the Québécois will recognize their best interest in choosing more promising sectors for mining development.



On that regard, I have a suggestion for the BAPE that would help in developing a comprehensive opinion on the subject. As you may know, in our Nation we have our own traditional specialists on the land and the resources our people rely on. Cree hunters and trappers have special responsibilities regarding the use of the land. In Eeyou society, political life has always been closely connected with the family and the land. The Eeyou have a worldview that emphasizes the integrated nature of the spiritual, familial, economic and political spheres.

In respect to our land, our resources and our traditional ways of life, hunters and trappers are the greatest specialists. You will not find greater expertise than that of the land users. So, respectfully, I suggest that the BAPE engage our experts to ensure it has sufficient knowledge of our culture to understand the potential impacts of uranium development on our livelihoods.

Before concluding, let me also remind you that as a First Nation, the Crees of Mistissini have aboriginal rights guaranteed by the Canadian constitution and international law. We also have treaty rights under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. This framework ensures that the Cree of Mistissini have the right to participate in decision making about issues impacting them. This right of free, prior and informed consent has been recognized by the Review Committee, COMEX, in its Environmental Review for the Matoush Uranium Exploration Project, in July 2011.

In its very first recommendation, the COMEX clearly stated that for the project to be authorized, “the proponent must obtain the Crees’ consent, through the Mistissini Band Council, with regard to the project’s social acceptability, and must enter into a written agreement to that effect with the Band Council or another body designated by the Band Council”. This conclusion is legally, politically and socially right.

In conclusion, let me say how proud I am of my community. I am proud of the people of Mistissini, who came out with unity to take a clear position against uranium. The movement started here and has rallied all other Cree communities. I can proudly say today that the Nation as a whole is united against uranium development. Et nous parlons maintenant à toutes les autres communautés autochtones, et à tous les Québécois, afin que nous soyons tous unis pour dire « non » à l’uranium. (repeat in Cree).

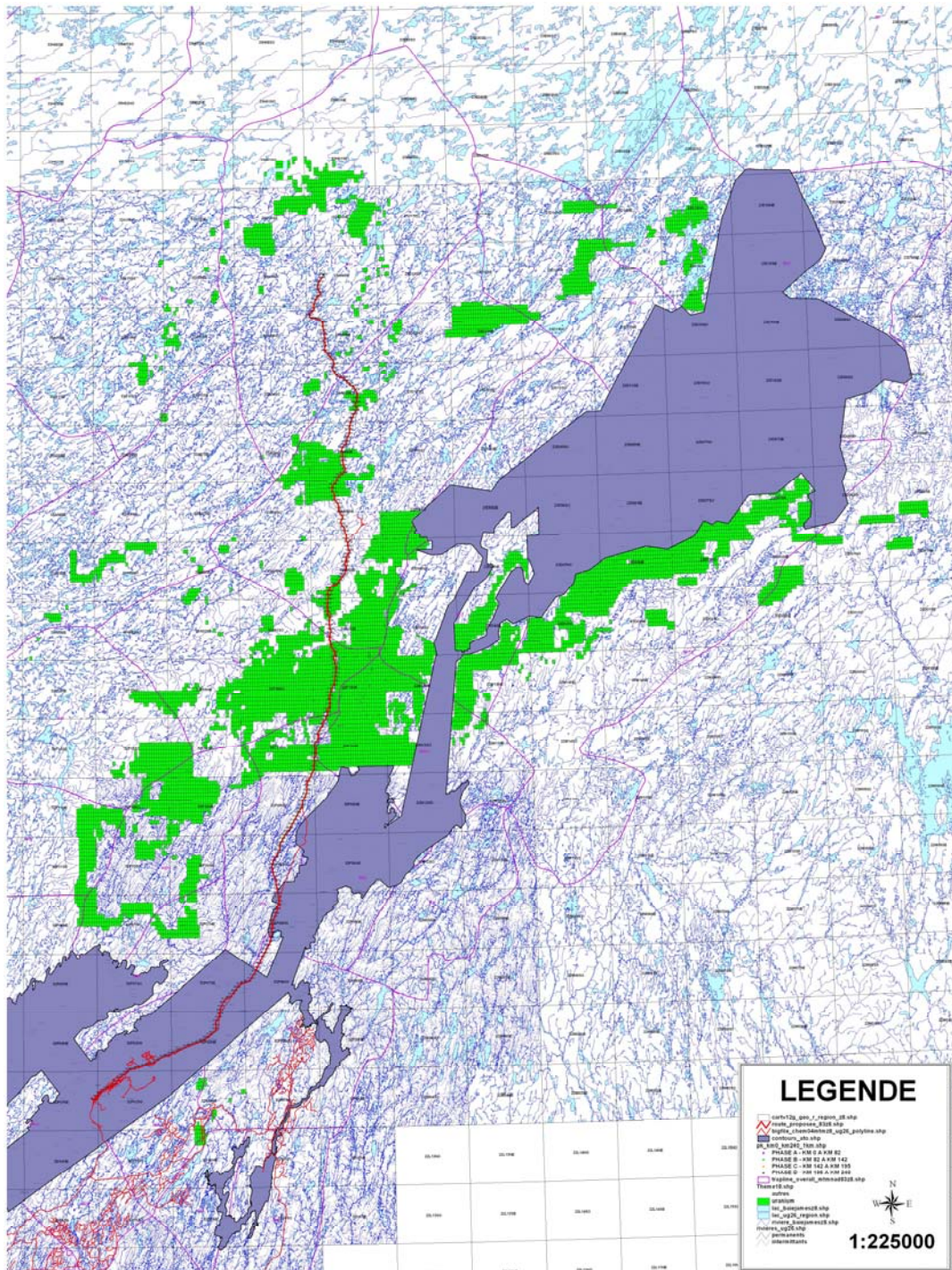
The new Quebec government is planning to get a new Plan Nord +on the rails. I support this initiative, as long as the “plus” stands for “plus intelligent”, “plus responsable”and “plus respectueux des communautés”. So, I say “yes” to Plan Nord +, minus uranium.

Thank you, Merci.



ANNEXE

Map of the Albalnel-Témiscamie-Otish National Park, with uranium mining claims





PICTURES OF TEMISCAMI FLOODING

