

Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review Summary of Comments: Ross River Public Meeting, July 4, 2013

INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of what the Government of Yukon (YG) team members heard regarding the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* during the public meeting held in Ross River, Yukon on July 4, 2013. It is intended to provide a record for both those who attended the event and those who did not and is consistent with the government's commitment to an open and transparent public review process. The comments below were gathered from the 12 people who attended this event.

YG staff shared information about YG water management programs and the draft Strategy itself, through a presentation, panel displays and discussion. Our purpose was to collect comments on the six priorities and the proposed actions for each. The event was requested and promoted by the Ross River Dene Council. Posters advertised the event, and it was also promoted through direct communication with key water stakeholders in the community.

The public review period for the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* officially ended on June 30, 2013. This meeting was accommodated outside the engagement period. For more information on the draft water strategy, please visit www.env.gov.yk.ca/draftwaterstrategy, call 667-3171 or 1-800-661-0405 X3171 or email water.resources@gov.yk.ca.

Please note the comments below are organized by the vision, goals, principles and priorities in the draft strategy rather than by the person commenting. They are not intended to be verbatim but rather to capture the main message/theme. These comments will be compiled with other comments received during the public review to form an overall engagement summary. If there are any inaccuracies in the document, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our contact information is provided at the end of this document.

Comments are presented in bulleted italic font under the topic area addressed.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Vision

- *No comments.*

Yukoners have access to safe and sufficient water to meet their needs in ways that also preserve ecosystem health now and into the future.

Principles

- *No comments.*

Sustainability: Undertake actions that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

Forward-looking: Anticipate future changes in water quality, quantity and needs due to factors such as cumulative effects, climate change and population growth.

Adaptability: Promote and develop adaptive management strategies to cope with uncertainty and change.

Security: Seek to maintain affordable, adequate, equitable and reliable water quality and quantity for all Yukoners.

Stewardship: Ensure Yukon's watersheds remain intact and healthy, based on both individual and shared responsibilities.

Cooperation: Develop and promote partnerships and collaboration as appropriate in light of shared responsibilities.

Respect: Demonstrate respect for the intrinsic value of water and the values and interests of all Yukoners.

Goals

- *No comments.*

Water for People: Ensure accessible, safe and sufficient water for drinking and other purposes, including industrial, recreational, heritage, cultural and spiritual uses and values. Promote sustainable and valuable use of water for communities and economies for key business sectors.

Water for Nature: Preserve water quality and quantity for aquatic health and ecosystem services while respecting the intrinsic value of water.

Water Monitoring, Knowledge and Management: Strengthen understanding, knowledge and overall management of water.

Priorities

Priority A: Better understand and manage Yukon's groundwater regime.

- *There are concerns about contamination from mining and the impacts to fish populations and health.*
- *Discussion about whether this document covers the concerns related to liquefied natural gas (LNG) and associated hydraulic fracturing. It was suggested that a recommendation be made through the strategy that would lead to no fracking in the Yukon until baseline data is collected.*
- *Discussion about what groundwater mapping entails and what monitoring requirements would be involved for development (chemistry, distribution, movement, quality).*
- *Discussion about what water testing the Yukon government (YG) provides (bacteriological is provided free of cost at the Whitehorse lab; chemical analysis is sent to a British Columbia lab for a cost).*
- *Questions around who takes care of water at abandoned mines (Energy, Mine and Resources has an Assessment and Abandoned Mines Branch).*
- *Discussion about what the priority for mapping groundwater could be (to be determined, but perhaps densely populated areas, where well data already exists (i.e. drinking water sources), etc.)*

Priority B: Maintain/improve access to safe drinking water for all Yukoners.

- *Discussion about drinking water sources. Some elders don't like the drinking water provided by the YG regulated drinking water supply. Some travel far to get water for tea. There is knowledge about which water is good for tea. YG only provides monitoring of the regulated drinking water supply (groundwater well) in the village.*

- *Discussion about chlorine in the water and how much goes in – many do not like the smell of chlorine in the drinking water. There was mention of it being very noticeable in holding tanks (the smell of chlorine indicates a dirty holding tank). Responsibility of the Ross River Dena Council (RRDC) for cleaning tanks was discussed. There are misconceptions about chlorine; more communication needs to be provided by the Yukon government about drinking water – information simply formatted and distributed often (quarterly).*
- *There are concerns regarding the location of the sewage treatment facility in that its proximity to the community well raises concern about potential contamination of drinking water. It seems clear that the current location is inadequate considering it is uphill from drinking water sources.*
- *There is a perception that various departments are not working together and communicating well. A more holistic and connected approach should be adopted.*
- *Health and Social Services should have authority on sewage location/land use in order to protect groundwater (as opposed to Community Services). The community has concerns with the location of the lagoon and asked Community Services during a meeting in Ross River last week to move it.*
- *The well/source should be on the other side of the Pelly, in the Old Village. There are minerals and silt in the Pelly River. The Ross River is better because it is filtered through a wetland complex (this would require a pipeline to town).*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *The RRDC has ‘best management practices’ as part of its Resource Management Plan.*
- *There were questions about how YG best practices differ from RRDC best practices; for example, the minimum distance road works must be away from a mineral lick.*
- *Government to government communication is needed to fill in the communication gaps.*
- *Discussion about the importance of headwaters and an expressed desire to see them referenced in the best practices or referenced somewhere within the Strategy. What about mining in the headwaters of our rivers?*

- *Care of (consideration of) water shouldn't be dissected from other elements, land, wetlands, sloughs, headwaters, fracking, cultural importance, navigable waters should all be considered in concert.*
- *Concern that exporting water to the United States (pipeline) will be in our future (water for sale in the store costs more than gasoline).*

Priority D: Improve the generation and use of water information.

- *Community and traditional knowledge should be drawn on. In the traditional ways, water is vital.*
- *Interest in being part of the information network, but resources are needed to be able to participate.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *Discussion about the proposed water forum and how the short and long term actions in the strategy could be prioritized.*
- *Interest in working together on monitoring; training will be needed.*

Priority F: Plan for water needs now and in the future.

- *Headwaters are where water is born. Elders have additional knowledge regarding headwaters; they are sacred land and should not be contaminated or used recklessly.*
- *Would like to see habitat protection and watershed management plans.*

General Comments

- *First Nations without Final Agreements do not have the processes and resources (i.e. Renewable Resource Councils) that First Nations with Agreements do. For example, there is political and legal perspective, but little in the way of resources to be able to participate. There are many concerns regarding this, including with fairness and capacity.*
- *Without resources provided, there will be an inability to adequately review important documents like the Water Strategy. There were questions about*

whether YG had resources to enable First Nations without Agreements to participate in these processes and whether they could recover costs incurred so far.

- *By not signing a Final Agreement, rights and titles to water have not been relinquished; water is important to the RRDC. The Yukon Water Strategy should be a joint effort between RRDC and YG for the RRDC traditional territory. YG needs to ensure that First Nations rights are protected.*
- *There is concern that there is a current disconnect between the land use and water issues. Joint plans have been made with governments with no land claims. For example, there is a resource management plan with Energy, Mines & Resources developed through the Northern Strategy Trust. The project is currently in its fourth year; have mapped all of their water. Yukon Conservation Society has also been involved. A comment was made regarding Environment's participation in this planning initiative.*
- *RRDC has a Water Strategy with mapping and recommendations. It's based on cultural values. There is interest in seeing how they can fit together. Would like to see a government to government mandate encompassing other (land based) interest and a more holistic approach. The YG framework is divisive.*

Summarized notes taken from translation of Elder comments:

- *Concern that there is too much mining happening (soon there will be three mines over the border) and when mining activity is over, the water will no longer be good (example provided of a nearby mine interrupting fish and beaver patterns; leaching from the holding ponds every year). With climate change and mine activity, the water quality has changed.*
- *Water (rivers, lakes and ponds) has significant cultural importance: important for travel, drinking, netting fish, spiritual uses (sweat lodges), recreational, medicinal plants and to the other mammals and insects that it supports and which support the people as a food source. Leaders are instructed to protect the water.*
- *Water is used today as it was in the past. The old ways mean that everything is connected and it is important to keep that balance. The Dene duty is to steward the land for all the next generations. The environment needs to be protected for humans and the ecosystem.*
- *Constitutional rights are still intact. The RRDC has sovereign rights to enjoy its whole territory, make decisions, control water rights and access. There is*

already a court case – Van der Peet is a test case on aboriginal rights; this will expand over time (seven generations).

- *There are no treaties in courts regarding aboriginal rights to water. Would prefer not to go to court over water rights; it is an option if voices are not heard.*
- *Concern about fracking; specifically feel that a decision on fracking should come in advance of the Water Strategy finalization. Water cannot be isolated from oil and gas business. Hydroelectric generation is also of concern.*

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received during the Ross River Public Meeting will help inform the Yukon government in the development of the final Yukon water strategy. Once this is completed, further work will be needed to prepare an action plan to describe how the short- and long-term actions will be addressed. This includes identifying departmental leads and partners as well as options, costs and timing for implementation activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Yukon government would like to thank the participants in the public review of the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy* at the Ross River Public Meeting held on July 4, 2013. Your feedback was extremely valuable and will help guide the continued development of a comprehensive, thoughtful and innovative water strategy for Yukon.

CONTACT

This document was prepared by Environment Yukon on behalf of the Strategic Water Initiatives Group on July 30, 2013.

For more information, please contact:

Heather Jirousek
Program Advisor
867-667-3121
heather.jirousek@gov.yk.ca

Miranda Allison
Water Strategy Development Officer
867-667-3171
miranda.allison@gov.yk.ca