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Dawn Mikkelson
Aquaries Media Corp.
136 E. 10th St.
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Dawn,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the rough cut of Green Green Water and to provide you with our feedback. We believe this film, in its present form, is hurtful to our people and offensive to our First Nation.

When we offered to take part in the documentary film about hydroelectric power and its impact on the lives of Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba, particularly the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, we expected it would focus on the effects of the Churchill River Diversion, but would also honestly profile our efforts to move on from the past towards economic sustainability and cultural recovery. We expected at least a minimum standard of objectivity.

Where is the balance?

While we respect the right of those opposed to hydroelectric development in the north to express their opinions, we are dismayed you would choose to disrespect us for pursuing a different path – a path we believe will bring benefits to our people. We assumed you would fairly represent our approach and our opinions.

Instead, only about 90 seconds of your interview with me was included in the 90-minute film, without providing any response to the misleading and inaccurate comments made about the proposed Wuskwatim project, primarily by Carol Kobliski and Peter Kulchyski. Chief John Miswagon's comments, which represent the views of Pimicikamak or Cross Lake, are positioned throughout the film as if he speaks for all First Nations, including the Nisichawayasihk, but he does not. Ken Bradley of Just Energy is positioned as an impartial environmental expert, though in fact he is an advocate for the windpower industry, with a vested but, we believe, misplaced interest in opposing the proposed Wuskwatim hydro development.

From the beginning of the film it seems clear there is little understanding about the hopes and aspirations of the Nisichawayasihk people and residents of South Indian Lake. The film makes no reference whatsoever to South Indian Lake's goal to achieve First Nation status, and how the struggle for that recognition has impacted that community.

Your camera is blind to the many examples of the hard won steps NCN has taken to improve our community, including the establishment of facilities and institutions like the new Atoskiwin Training and Employment Centre of Excellence (ATEC), Nelson House Medicine Lodge, O.K. Elementary School, our Personal Care Home and Family and Community Wellness Centre, to name just a few.

Historic context is missing

The film instead focuses only on the negative, as if all our problems would simply not have occurred without the influence of the Churchill River Diversion. This view is at odds with the well-documented history of Aboriginal people in Canada. What about the impact of colonization, paternalistic government decisions, the anti-fur lobby, religious and educational interference?

By ignoring the background to the underlying problems that affect many of Canada's First Nations, the film is almost entirely lacking in context. These problems have been ongoing for over 100 years. In the late 1960s, Manitoba's First Nations joined together for the first time to take real steps to address the problems facing all of us. This culminated in the 1971 report, *Wahbung Our Tomorrows by the Indian Tribes of Manitoba*, which I have included in the package of information attached.

This report provides a real snapshot of the multi-faceted problems we needed to address. The information contained in this report was compiled prior to the CRD and it is still considered to be a relevant document today. By reading this report, you will better understand that while the problems of some First Nations were compounded by the hydroelectric development, it wasn't the major cause.

Throughout northern Canada, you will find the plight of many First Nations is little changed from the situation described in 1971. If you had wanted to be objective and balanced, you would have looked at some Manitoba First Nations that have not been affected by hydro projects. You would have discovered they share a sad reality of poverty and social problems that are common to Manitoba First Nations today.

Achievements and progress have been overlooked

While the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation has suffered for over 100 years, we believe we have finally turned the page on that history. Today we are a progressive, democratic First Nation, but you wouldn't know that from viewing the film. In fact, it paints the opposite picture, suggesting we are pawns in a game. How would you feel if your struggle for self-determination was ridiculed in this way?

The film makes no effort to review any of the significant achievements made since we signed our NFA Implementation Agreement in 1996. The difference is like night and day. This isn't true just for NCN, but also for the other First Nations that signed agreements.

I have taken the liberty of sending a copy of the film to the other signatories to the NFA implementation agreements, who could be negatively impacted by the film. These are Tataskweyak Cree Nation, York Factory First Nation and Norway House Cree Nation. None of us would agree with Peter Kulchyski's view that the implementation agreements were "extinguishment" agreements. How can you put forward only his point of view knowing how it denigrates the efforts of our people to move forward following decades of struggle?

You mentioned the fact that, under our 1996 NFA agreement, NCN received about \$64.9 million. Though that is true, it is only part of the picture. The 1996 agreement also contains other valuable provisions. It obligates Manitoba Hydro to pay 90 percent of the costs of operating and maintaining the arena at Nelson House in perpetuity. If Hydro wants to build new projects that might affect NCN, the 1996 agreement obligates Hydro to finalize compensation arrangements with NCN before it can start to build. This will prevent a repeat of what happened to us in the 1970s. You fail to mention this.

I have included the latest report of the Nisichawayasihk Trust, which was established to use the funds from our 1996 agreement to better our community. I have also included NCN's latest annual report showing the work of the organizations that serve our people, and a brochure from the Family and Community Wellness Centre, which was built and funded in part by proceeds from the 1996 agreement. The Trust has allocated over \$42 million dollars to community projects and programs since it was established.

As is, this is an exploitive film that rips at healing wounds

We have taken a holistic approach to healing our people from the past injustices. It has been a long, hard road. It doesn't help to have our struggle sensationalized in an inaccurate film that rips at our wounds and causes further undue pain, at the very time we are trying to heal together as a First Nation. Is this how you hope to help us?

We are all working towards a positive future

Make no mistake. What happened to our First Nation in the past could not happen today. Canadian environmental laws are much better today than they were 30 years ago. In addition to the 1996 Agreement, section 35 of the 1982 Canadian Constitution protects our treaty and aboriginal rights. Stronger than any law is our people's resolve never to be manipulated or submit to this kind of exploitation or subjugation ever again. We've learned a hard lesson, which we will not forget.

While we have made great strides, there is still work to do. We will shortly finalize the Wuskwatim Project Development Agreement with Manitoba Hydro, which will be given to our community for review. Our Members will ultimately determine whether to proceed with this project, which if approved in a secret-ballot vote, offers long-term economic benefits. If our voters vote "no", there will be no project.

It hasn't been easy to reach this point. Some of our Members may never trust Manitoba Hydro, even though the people who are running the corporation today are not the people who were in charge 30 years ago. Our negotiation team has worked long and very hard to get the best deal possible for our people to consider. Manitoba Hydro has also negotiated hard. We have done this with mutual respect for each other as people. We have both learned through this process.

We have also ensured there will be meaningful training and jobs for our Members and other Aboriginal people in the north, including residents at South Indian Lake. ATEC will go on training and acting as a job referral agency for our people, whether or not Wuskwatim goes ahead. We have used our Traditional Knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors to guide us throughout the process.

Independent assessments support Wuskwatim project

Throughout this negotiation we have used our own engineers, legal advisers and professional consultants to assist us. We negotiated the funding for this project through Article 8 of our 1996 NFA Implementation Agreement. We insisted on the inclusion of the Article in the agreement, as it guarantees no development of our resources can take place without consultation and our input. We make the decisions on how we deploy our resources, not Manitoba Hydro.

Your film also includes the opinions of one individual, that Wuskwatim might somehow affect Southern Indian Lake. In fact, all of the engineering evidence makes it crystal clear that Wuskwatim will have no effect on Southern Indian Lake. At the Clean Environment Commission public hearings into Wuskwatim, opponents of the project failed to present any engineering evidence to the contrary. You fail to mention this.

Manitoba Hydro initially wanted to build a high-head dam at Taskinigahp Falls, but that would have caused too much flooding, and was rejected by our negotiators. What we decided on was a low-head dam that will cause less than one-fifth of a square mile of flooding. None of this is mentioned in the film, which actually suggests there will be massive flooding. You know this is wrong, or you should.

Even the proposed Conawapa Generating Station, which would be the largest in northern Manitoba, would only cause approximately three square miles of flooding. And Conawapa is only proposed. More than once your film refers to Wuskwatim as the first in a series of hydro megaprojects. This is highly misleading.

It is true that Manitoba Hydro is looking at two possible future projects in northern Manitoba - Conawapa and Keeyask, but there is no firm plan to build either one. There have been no licence applications for either. If there is a licence application some day, there will be public hearings - the outcome of which cannot be prejudged. It is possible that neither potential project will ever be built. You fail to mention this.

The potential environmental impact of Wuskwatim has been independently reviewed by the provincial and federal regulators, as well as Manitoba's Clean Environment Commission (CEC). The CEC conducted public hearings over four months, where both opponents and proponents, as well as independent groups such as the Consumers' Association of Canada, were able to put forward their positions under oath. In addition, the department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada has just completed a comprehensive study of the Wuskwatim Generation Project as part of a cooperative environmental assessment with the Government of Manitoba and has submitted its report to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. These major independent assessments all agree the proposed Wuskwatim Generation Project isn't expected to cause any significant adverse environmental effect.

Questionable statements go unchallenged

Opponents to the Wuskwatim project are diverse in their objectives and motivations. For Carol Kobliski, it is at least partly politically motivated. She ran for NCN's Council in the last election and lost. You failed to mention this. Since then she has continued a campaign to discredit the positions of those who won. This is a democracy. She can vote against Wuskwatim if she wants and she can run for Council again. So far, the majority of people haven't supported her. It really is that simple.

In the film she implies she could get a better deal than our negotiating team. She says she has been threatened. She says all the people support her. She says she can see fear in the eyes of Manitoba Hydro and our legal team. She says things that, in my opinion, aren't true. Still, none of her statements are challenged. No balance is offered to the viewer.

Who are you REALLY trying to help?

In the promotion of the film, Manitoba Hydro is vilified on the basis that it spends money to market and sell its product to a major market, even though this is a standard business practice. Glenn Schneider, Hydro's public affairs manager, is quite right when he tells you on film that misinformation about today's hydroelectric development in the north has the potential to do real harm and damage to the future of much needed renewable energy developments.

You are among those actively promoting a U.S.-based consumer boycott of Manitoba's hydroelectric power - without regard to the impact such a boycott would have on the long-term economic recovery of progressive First Nations, who are now in a position to profit from hydroelectric development. Who benefits from this action? Is it the U.S.-based wind power lobby? Is it U.S.-based coal producers? Is it environmental organizations that use the plight of Manitoba First Nations to raise funds for their programs? How do you benefit as an Xcel Energy consumer? Do you really think all your power needs and those of your neighbours would be served by wind power or conservation alone?

Perhaps if you expanded your source of environmental information beyond ME3 and Just Energy, you would learn that Canada is a world leader in addressing the issues of climate change. In addition, the Ottawa-based, internationally acclaimed David Suzuki Foundation considers Manitoba to have the best plan to address climate change in Canada, which includes a mix of hydroelectric, wind power and geothermal development. It should also be noted that Manitoba Hydro has aggressive power conservation programs, and is adding wind turbines to its own system.

The choice is between economic renewal and poverty – not our culture

Near the end of the film you comment that First Nations are being “forced to choose” between economic renewal and cultural traditions and values. Where did you get this idea? It is completely wrong. There is no conflict between the two. We can have both, and our community will be stronger for it. In fact, economic development is essential to preserving and strengthening our culture and avoiding poverty.

Please refer to page vii of the Wahbung report to better understand where we are coming from in responding to critiques of our First Nation and our goals and aspirations, by outsiders like you, Peter Kulchyski, Will Braun and Ken Bradley. The fundamental facts outlined in this report still apply today.

1. We are determined, strong and proud.
2. We refuse to let our lives be directed by others who do not and cannot know our ways.
3. We are 21st century people. Not some folkloric remnant. We are perfectly capable and competent to assess our environment and make positive decisions.

Green Green view is one-eyed

I recommend you review the material I have enclosed. In its present form, this film dishonours the First Nations of Manitoba. I believe anyone with any objective knowledge of the important issues, which you have skewed to suit your purpose, will pan your film. We see what we hope is your genuine passion for our story, but your view is one-eyed. In your film you say your power is in telling the story of the few. We hope you have the integrity and foresight to see how this has the potential to do much harm to the many – our children.

In closing, I urge you to reconsider your approach and tell a story that is not a superficial, paternalistic caricature of what, for us, is a serious struggle to improve the lot of our people. You should at least give NCN and other First Nations a fair opportunity to set out their position and present factual information, to counter the misinformation presented in your film. If you insist on distributing this film, without addressing the very serious concerns raised in this letter, I ask that you consider adding the text of this letter to the end of the film, before the credits.

Sincerely,



Chief Jerry Primrose
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

Enclosed:

1. Wabung Our Tomorrows
2. Address by Grand Chief Dennis Whitebird of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Secretariat Inc. to the Clean Environment Commission
3. Globe and Mail Comment by Grand Chief Stan Beardy of Nishnawbe Aski Nation
4. Winnipeg Free Press Comment by Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine
5. Winnipeg Free Press Editorial – Reserves: Let the people go
6. Winnipeg Free Press Report – Aid won't reverse poverty: top chief
7. Winnipeg Free Press Letter – We can do better
8. NCN Year in Review 2004/05
9. NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre Inc, A Pathway to Wellness
10. Nisichawayasihk Trust Office 2004 Narrative Report and Financial Statements
11. Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, A Progressive First Nation in Canada
12. NCN History of support for SIL as a Separate First Nation
13. Moving Forward Newsletter Towards An Independent First Nation for OPCN
14. News Update, Spring 2005 – Responding to the Critics and Misinformation About the Wuskwatim Project
15. NCN response to ME3 Newsletter
16. Letter to Editor Winnipeg Free Press - Cross Lake should hold referendum
17. NCN reply to Washington Post's In the Boreal Forest, A Developing Storm
18. NCN reply to Peter Kulchyski's Legacy of Hatred in Canadian Dimension
19. NCN reply to Will Braun's story in Eyeopener
20. TCN reply to Will Braun's story in World Rivers Review
21. TCN reply to "Damaged" Mike Mossdale's story in City Pages

Letter copied to:

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Grand Chief Ron Evans
MKO Grand Chief Sydney Garrioch
York Factory First Nation Chief Roy Beardy
Tataskweyak Cree Nation Chief Norman Flett
Norway House Cree Nation Acting Chief Fred Muskego
O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Headman Chris Baker
Manitoba Hydro CEO and President Robert Brennan
Xcel Energy CEO and President Richard C. Kelly
Green Green Water Advisors:
- Jim Compton
- Greta Gaard
- Winona LaDuke
- Craig Minowa
- James Nicholas
- Patrick Spears