

12. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mackenzie Gas Project Public Participation

The public participation program for the Mackenzie Gas Project (see EIS Volume 1, Section 4) was conducted in all regions in the Mackenzie Valley, including the:

- Inuvialuit Settlement Region
- Gwich'in Settlement Area
- Sahtu Settlement Area
- Deh Cho Region

The public participation program involved two rounds of activity:

- Round 1: identifying and scoping issues
- Round 2: assessing and managing effects

Each round consisted of meetings with potentially affected communities, followed by regional workshops. Adjustments to this approach were made to accommodate the overall schedule of the EIS and to respond to regional preferences.

Follow-up meetings are being planned and held in the individual communities. The purpose of these meetings is to review the findings of the EIS, and discuss with communities how their input in the public participation process was addressed in the EIS.

Northwestern Alberta Public Participation

Initially, the Mackenzie Gas Project was to be constructed from the anchor fields to a location near the Bootis Hill area in northwestern Alberta. Subsequently, the Mackenzie Gas Project was modified to end the pipeline just south of the Northwest Territories–Alberta boundary, where it would connect with the NGTL system. The Mackenzie Gas Project's EIS Terms of Reference included the proposed NGTL pipelines – the Dickins Lake and Vardie River sections – in northwestern Alberta. Therefore, the Mackenzie Gas Project's public participation program was adapted to include northwestern Alberta communities. However, the intention of the Mackenzie Gas Project was to communicate information only on the Mackenzie Gas Project.

Socio-economic and biophysical data for the Mackenzie Gas Project was collected for the EIS in northwestern Alberta along the Dickins Lake and Vardie River sections. This data collection was separate from the public participation program.

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Interested parties who might be affected by the Dickins Lake and Vardie River sections include:

- the Dene Tha' First Nation (DTFN)
- local business owners
- municipal governments
- other public agencies
- the general public

In July 2002, Mackenzie Gas Project representatives initiated the public participation process and conducted preliminary discussions with interested parties in northwestern Alberta. Meetings were held with municipal government representatives and community service providers, primarily to obtain baseline information for the socio-economic assessment.

Meetings with the Dene Tha' First Nation

Mackenzie Gas Project representatives initiated participation activities with the DTFN in July 2002. The main purpose of the initial meeting with the band manager was to introduce the Mackenzie Gas Project and to collect data on the socio-economic circumstances of the DTFN. The meeting helped to establish a main community contact for gathering additional information.

On September 18, 2002, a meeting was held with the Chief, Council and Elders. This meeting served to reintroduce and clarify details about the Mackenzie Gas Project, and to respond to initial queries and identify concerns related to the EIS study process.

On October 17, 2002, Mackenzie Gas Project representatives were invited to attend an industry trade fair in Chateh, Alberta. Information about the Mackenzie Gas Project was provided to trade fair participants, including participants from the Chateh community.

In January 2003, Mackenzie Gas Project representatives met with DTFN consultants, and discussed the need to meet with the community about the Mackenzie Gas Project and the Mackenzie Gas Project's proposed approach for conducting traditional knowledge studies with the DTFN. At that time, the Mackenzie Gas Project representatives stated they would be building a short segment of pipeline south of the Northwest Territories–Alberta boundary to the NGTL interconnect facility. Since then, Mackenzie Gas Project representatives have contacted DTFN leaders to determine opportunities for continuing discussions about the Mackenzie Gas Project.

In September 2003, a Master Services Agreement was negotiated and signed with the DTFN to facilitate employment of local field assistants in collecting biophysical field data. The Master Services Agreement was renewed in February 2004.

Additional meetings were held with DTFN representatives during the first quarter of 2004. Mackenzie Gas Project representatives attempted to share project information and negotiate agreements on consultation protocol. The environmental consultants obtained socio-economic data for the EIS.

Efforts have continued to engage the DTFN in the Mackenzie Gas Project environmental consultation process of issues identification and mitigation. Information has been exchanged, and in June 2004, at the request of the DTFN, their senior leaders met with Mackenzie Gas Project representatives to seek ways to move discussions forward.

Although the Mackenzie Gas Project representatives' initial meetings with the DTFN were held in the DTFN communities, the DTFN leaders have declined requests from Mackenzie Gas Project representatives to engage DTFN communities in the environmental consultation process. Mackenzie Gas Project representatives understand that the DTFN leaders require a letter of intent, followed by a protocol agreement, to be resolved before the DTFN will engage in the environmental consultation process. Currently, the Mackenzie Gas Project and the DTFN have been unable to agree on the terms of the letter of intent. The Mackenzie Gas Project representatives continue to make efforts to do so.

Currently, NGTL representatives are communicating with the DTFN about the development of the Dickins Lake and Vardie River sections. This communication will be referenced as part of NGTL's application to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB).

Other Meetings

Mackenzie Gas Project representatives held meetings with municipal government representatives and community service providers in the region, to obtain baseline information for the socio-economic assessment. Communities visited included:

- Rainbow Lake
- High Level
- Zama

During these meetings, local officials and public service-delivery representatives were briefed on the Mackenzie Gas Project. The main concerns raised were:

- business and employment opportunities
- the impact of the increased traffic volumes on regional transportation infrastructure expected during construction.

Mackenzie Gas Project representatives also participated in a March 2004 seminar in High Level, hosted by the Northern Alberta Development Council.

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Issues Raised

Because information gathering is in the initial stages for all DTFN communities, few issues have been raised. However, during meetings held to date with Mackenzie Gas Project representatives, the communities expressed the need for business opportunities to be long term.

In addition, the DTFN has expressed a strong desire to be included in the Aboriginal Pipeline Group.

Future Participation Activities

Mackenzie Gas Project representatives are planning to undertake more public consultation in northwestern Alberta.

Environmental consultants intend to provide information on the Mackenzie Gas Project at open houses to be held in the communities of High Level, Rainbow Lake and Zama in the first quarter of 2005. The primary purpose of these open houses will be to present EIS-related information and answer questions.

Environmental consultants will also offer to conduct open houses and focus group meetings in the DTFN communities of Chateh, Meander River and Bushe River. The focus group meetings will be closed meetings, offered to the members of leadership organizations by invitation. Open houses are open to the public.