



## *Alternatives North*

January 27, 2019

To all Members of the Legislative Assembly of the NWT;

We commend efforts to develop a wise and effective long term strategy to deploy green electricity throughout the NWT. Green energy solutions are imperative, communities need secure, affordable energy and the NWT economy needs affordable power to help lower the cost of living and doing business.

The NWT government has a longstanding “hydro strategy” with plans to install dams on a number of NWT rivers as the solution. We question the wisdom of that approach. Electricity from hydro dams is not “green” energy. River dams typically impact aquatic life, affect water quality, release greenhouse gases and mercury and cause downstream issues. Note that after 30 years of operation, there is still a public health advisory in place due to mercury contamination of lake trout in Nonacho Lake, the headwaters of the Taltson system: (<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/fish-consumption-notice-nonacho-lake.pdf>). In other parts of the world, work is underway to decommission old dams and rectify the serious damage they caused. Current GNWT policy would have us go the other way.

Rather than damming large rivers to generate electricity that is offered at low rates to industry as a subsidy to stimulate industrial development, truly sustainable development requires a comprehensive approach that includes locally and regionally derived energy focused on communities. That approach facilitates appropriately scaled and locally focused economic development. That is the most effective path to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Your current plan to further dam the Taltson River and run a costly powerline under Great Slave Lake to deploy electricity on the slim chance that it will stimulate the development of new mines runs contrary to those principles. The existing excess power on the Taltson system should be used to build a South Slave economy and strengthen communities there, for example by powering electric vehicles and heating homes and businesses. Given today’s technologies, new mines should be expected to produce a significant proportion of their energy needs from renewable resources.

The power generated by the current Taltson hydro installation has been wasted routinely since Pine Point Mine shut down in 1988. Tens of millions of dollars in revenue that could have helped balance the cost of generating power with diesel plants in isolated northern communities has been wasted. That is a travesty. It stems from a long-standing unofficial policy to retain electricity for the use of mines as a priority over using it for communities. If the surplus electricity is to be used for a mine it is “uninterruptible power.” If used for communities it can only be “interruptible power.” Communities can never use it as a secure and lasting source of electricity. Giving priority to industrial development over the quality of life of the people of the NWT is unacceptable.

The GNWT’s primary focus should be fostering viable local economies that result in strong, sustainable communities. Currently when it comes to electricity, mines come first and then there is an ineffective scramble to improve the lot of the people. A majority of resources are funneled

to stimulate resource development. Yet the use of fly-in workforces from the south as a solution to mine staffing is a worsening problem. Your approach to resource development primarily benefits outside developers, offers a short term boost to local contractors and creates fleeting jobs that few northerners are well suited to.

The concentration of resources in a mega-project like Taltson expansion can only take resources away from efforts to build 100% renewable community energy systems, which should be the focus of NTPC and the GNWT energy branch. Your expensive plans to expand and distribute Taltson power will divert much needed funding from renewable energy projects in all NWT communities. Our report "100% Renewable Energy in the NWT" outlines many alternatives to dams and transmission lines, using existing technologies. Large hydro projects have a very poor track record of delivering power on time and at predicted costs. One need look no further than the current Commission of Inquiry Respecting the Muskrat Falls Project and huge cost overruns for Site C on the Peace River in BC. The recently built Bluefish Dam east of Yellowknife was originally projected to cost less than \$19 million and its final tally was \$37 million. Why has there been no evaluation of other energy options outside of Taltson expansion?

We also question how the proposed Taltson expansion can enable the NWT to achieve 44% of the required Pan Canadian Framework greenhouse gas reductions as has been claimed, with no mines signed on to buy the power, and an insignificant demand for additional electricity in Yellowknife. The NWT's efforts to achieve those goals would be much better directed at a comprehensive program directed at heating and transportation as well as electricity production. For example, energy efficient retrofits and conversion of all homes and buildings to wood pellet heating would cost less, reduce more GHG emissions, create more local employment, actually reduce the cost of living and doing business, and improve our housing situation.

We ask you to reconsider the plan to expand Taltson power and focus instead on better utilizing what is already available from the current dam regionally, to benefit South Slave communities. And we ask that you leave the creation of new mines to the private sector, who are in a much better position to determine which mine will be economically viable. Instead, work as a priority to apply available public resources to stabilize and strengthen NWT communities, lowering the cost of living and enhancing the quality of life of the people of the NWT.

On behalf of Alternatives North,



Robert G. Bromley

c.c.: Michael McLeod, MP NWT  
Mayor Rebecca Alty, City of Yellowknife  
Mayor Lynn Napier-Buckley, Town of Fort Smith  
Mayor Kandis Jameson, Town of Hay River  
Mayor Louis Balsillie, Hamlet of Fort Resolution  
Mayor Winnifred Cadieux, Hamlet of Enterprise

Mayor Danny Beaulieu, Hamlet of Fort Providence  
Chief Lloyd Chicot, Ka'agee Tu First Nation  
Chief Roy Fabian, Katlodeechee First Nation  
Chief Frieda Martselos, Salt River First Nation  
Chief John Tourangeau, Smith's Landing First Nation  
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Mr. Mike Lalonde, President, Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce