



Northwest Territory
Métis Nation

Joint Press Release on Nagwichoonjik Water Summit

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE [Northwest Territories – March 21, 2023, Delegates from the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit, and Northwest Territory Métis Nation met in Inuvik from March 13-17, 2023, attending the Dene Nation Nagwichoonjik Water Summit. The summit was called to address the many outstanding concerns and issues associated with water in the north.

Duane Smith, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation Chair stated, "The Inuvialuit are pleased that we were able to meet with representatives of the Dene Nation and Northwest Territory Metis Nation on water related issues. There are no boundaries when we deal with the environment. We have to do this together."

Much of the focus was on the recent tailings' ponds spill from the Alberta tar sands containing toxic chemicals including arsenic leaking into the watershed and flowing to the Arctic Ocean to International waters. Imperial Oil Ltd's Kearl mine has released wastewater harmful to wildlife for almost a year before reports surfaced in February of this year.

Garry Bailey, President of the Northwest Territory Metis Nation commented, *"It was great for our Elders, youth, and elected leaders to come together with the Dene and the Inuvialuit in this historic gathering at Inuvik to share our common concerns about water and to make recommendations to Canada on how we, the Indigenous Governments of the NWT, believe Canada should address water issues plaguing the Mackenzie Valley watershed. I look forward to the Indigenous Governments continuing to work together and I anticipate a follow-up summit in the near future."*

A joint statement of concerns and recommendations was worked on and approved by the summit providing instructions and guidance on how to move forward. This summit was the first time the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Metis Nation have met on a priority and urgent issue to agree on how to proceed together.

Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine stated, *"The Nagwichoonjik Water Summit was a historic and important step. It brought the Original Families together and allowed them to focus on how to frame the steps forward to address the health and environmental issues of our home, Mother Earth, and to seek commitments from those who are responsible for these impacts."*

Attachments: Water Summit Joint Statement

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JOINT STATEMENT MARCH 16, 2023

Nagwichoonyik Water Summit, March 13th – 17th, 2023, Inuvik, NT

TITLE: Joint statement of the delegates of the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation at the Nagwichoonyik Water Summit

PREAMBLE:

- A. Representatives of the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation met with Indigenous delegates and knowledge-holders to discuss water issues, concerns and potential solutions at the first Water Summit, hosted in Inuvik, NT, March 13th to 17th, 2023;
- B. The Indigenous Peoples across the territories of the Dene Nations, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation are the stewards of the lands and the waters that are most affected by downstream impacts and transboundary matters;
- C. As the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation, we have always stewarded our lands and waters in accordance with our inherent laws, rights and practices;
- D. For decades, Canada, Alberta and other provincial/territorial governments have permitted development in the Mackenzie Water Basin, including tar sands development, without regard for sustainability and the cumulative impacts on the ecosystem and Indigenous rights, culture and way of life;
- E. These issues are exemplified by failures on the management of tailings ponds, including the recent tailings leak from the Imperial Oil Kearl project;
- F. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation shared an update with Nagwichoonyik Water Summit delegates on efforts to date to protect their lands and waters and they are seeking commitments from Canada and Alberta;
- G. The impacts of development, contaminants and climate change are felt throughout the Mackenzie Water Basin and flowing into international waters in the Beaufort Sea and Arctic marine environment;
- H. The way of life of the Indigenous Peoples of the Northwest Territories is adversely affected by contaminants;
- I. Indigenous Peoples must participate as full partners in the Northern Contaminants Program to lead and guide monitoring efforts and support community engagement;



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THEREFORE, we, the Water Summit delegates of the Dene Nation, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation, jointly state that we support:

1. The respect and inclusion of Traditional/Indigenous Knowledge to better understand the impacts on our lands and waters, and to guide any future studies;
2. The Indigenous Nations in their efforts to address the health and environmental issues related to tar sands operations and releases from tailings ponds on their lands/waters;
3. Seeking commitments from Canada, Alberta and other respective governments, including;
 - a. new supports for Indigenous-led monitoring efforts;
 - b. accountability from Alberta and industry on the management, notification and monitoring of tailings ponds and any leaks;
 - c. commitments to fund an independent study by structural engineers to evaluate the integrity of all tar sand tailing ponds;
 - d. an overhaul of the Mine Financial Security Program to ensure that industry pays for the reclamation and remediation of tar sand tailings ponds;
 - e. commitments from Canada and respective governments to engage with Indigenous governments as full partners on regulatory development and reform efforts for tailings management; and
 - f. commitments for a full independent investigation of the downstream impacts of tar sands pollution on water and air quality, aquatic ecosystems, and human health, including consideration of both Traditional/Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science;



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4. The leadership and participation of Indigenous parties on future research and monitoring for all aspects of the ecosystem, as well as climate change and cumulative impacts, including impacts on water and related plant, fish and wildlife and human health;
5. The development of a database for sharing observations among our peoples on climate change and impacts on our lands and waters;
6. Improved funding support to develop the database and new Indigenous-led studies on climate change and cumulative impacts throughout the Mackenzie Water Basin;
7. The full participation of Dene, Inuvialuit and Northwest Territory Métis Nation as leaders on all transboundary water matters;
8. The commencement of key discussions with the current parties to the Master Agreement to address the need to update, modernize and amend the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement to include the Indigenous Peoples as full parties and modern participants;
9. Additional, multi-year funding for Indigenous governments and our communities to better support the Northern Contaminants Program and support Indigenous-led contaminants monitoring;
10. The use of new Northern Contaminants Program microplastic research funds to support Indigenous-led studies;
11. The expansion of the Northern Contaminants Program mandate to consider contaminants from domestic Canadian sources, like the tar sands, abandoned mines, pulp mills, and hydroelectric projects, which also contribute to cross-boundary pollution;
12. The establishment of partnerships with independent laboratories for the reliable and independent assessment of samples collected for contaminants testing, and the consistent requirement that the results must be fully reported to Indigenous communities;
13. The hosting of another Water Summit, at a date and location to be determined.