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Comité consultatif de l'environnement Kativik  
Kativik Environmental Advisory Committee

## TRANSMITTED BY EMAIL

August 25, 2020

Indigenous Affairs Branch  
Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources naturelles  
5700–4<sup>e</sup> Avenue West, C-422  
Quebec City QC  
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### **SUBJECT: KEAC feedback and recommendations on the *Plan québécois pour le développement des minéraux critiques ou stratégiques 2020-2025***

The Kativik Environmental Advisory Committee (KEAC) was created pursuant to Section 23 of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*. It is a consultative body to responsible governments in matters relating to environmental and social protection in Nunavik and, as such, is the preferential and official forum for the Government of Canada, the Gouvernement du Québec, the Kativik Regional Government and the northern villages. Provided below are the KEAC's feedback and recommendations regarding the second phase of consultations launched by the Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources naturelles (energy and natural resources, MERN) on July 28, 2020, concerning the *Plan québécois pour le développement des minéraux critiques ou stratégiques 2020-2025* (development of critical or strategic minerals, PQDMCS).

#### **General feedback**

Some information is provided on page 9 of the consultation document about innovation centres in the fields of mining development, metallurgy and the environment, and it is indicated that some of these innovation centres are located in the regions. The KEAC believes that mobilization of the regional potential is especially important in this sector of activity and that the PQDMCS could be more explicit regarding the resources and expertise available in remote regions and, in particular, within Indigenous organizations. For example, through Action 1.2.1, the MERN intends to conduct mapping of all stakeholders, their objectives and current projects and, then, assess the pertinence of establishing a knowledge sharing and development network that would be recognized in Québec, in Canada and around the world. The KEAC feels that such a network would be beneficial and that, given current and future mineral exploration and mining activities, special attention should be focused on non-industrial stakeholders in the north, their specific governance context, how they use the land, and their interest in and experience with mining development.

On page 14, it is indicated that an advisory committee comprising public and private partners as well as regional and Indigenous stakeholders will provide support to the MERN to implement the PQDMCS. The KEAC suggests that care be exercised to ensure that the composition of the advisory committee includes adequate representation of the populations that will be directly affected by the multiplication of mineral exploration and mining projects.

The KEAC would like to point out that, at this time, a number of policies, strategies and plans are being implemented by various departments of the Québec government. These include the *Plan stratégique 2019-2023 – Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs* (strategic plan – forests, wildlife and parks), the 2019–2024 Action Plan under the *Québec Residual Materials Management Policy*, the *Stratégie gouvernementale de développement durable 2021-2026* (sustainable development strategy), the *Plan pour une économie verte 2030* (green economy), the *2030 Energy Policy*, and the *Sustainable Mobility Policy – 2030*. Issues that overlap with the PQDMCS are covered, such as the amendment of public land use plans and development of the circular economy. The KEAC would like to better understand how these different policies, strategies and plans are interconnected in order to ensure they are implemented smoothly in northern Québec.

The KEAC welcomes the integration of several actions into the PQDMCS to reduce the environmental impacts of critical or strategic minerals (CSM) development, for example by focusing attention on the management and processing of mine tailings. The KEAC is nonetheless of the opinion that more information should be provided on how the MERN plans to integrate cultural heritage protection and biodiversity protection – both key principles of sustainable development – into the PQDMCS.

### **Specific feedback**

#### **Objective 1.1: Develop the CSM potential of Québec**

Under action 1.1.2, the MERN will employ new digital and technological tools to enhance knowledge of the environmental characteristics of CSM exploration and mining. According to the MERN, this will make it possible to take into account environmental impacts caused by mine tailings, as early as possible in the development process. The new data will improve environmental impact assessment work. The KEAC understands that the management of mine tailings is a major environmental issue of CSM mining projects. Notwithstanding, it is not the only issue. The KEAC therefore proposes that the new digital and technological tools also be used to analyze an even wider number of environmental and social impacts.

#### **Objective 1.2: Improve knowledge of CSM by fostering synergies between research, development and innovation**

Arctic and subarctic ecosystems possess specific characteristics that must be integrated into the analysis of potential impacts. Ecological and physical processes are slower, increasing the time needed for pollutants to breakdown. The time needed for revegetation is also longer and the threshold at which disturbances can become irreversible is lower than in southern Québec. In addition, infrastructure and the Inuit and Naskapi ways of life are currently under pressure to adapt to many challenges being posed by climate change. The shortage of expertise and knowledge on environmental and social impacts at the different stages of mine life cycles is a barrier often encountered during impact reviews. For this reason, the KEAC believes that Action 1.2.2, which would ensure new CSM deposits are developed in a manner that is respectful of the environment, social development and public health, is very important.

#### **Objective 2.1: Foster sustainable CSM exploration and development**

Under Action 2.1.1, the MERN intends to establish mechanisms that will protect CSM resources of interest to Québec by designating areas that should be reserved and eventually developed. Whereas the first orientation of the PQDMCS targets increased knowledge and expertise on CSM in Québec, the second orientation already proposes to reserve areas for development. Given all the knowledge that remains to be acquired, the KEAC finds this proposal to be rushed. The process of designating CSM areas is a delicate one that should only be implemented following in-depth analysis of all other solutions, such as recycling and the use of alternative materials. The KEAC is of the opinion that strict guidelines are needed to govern these mechanisms. The PQDMCS moreover stipulates that designated areas would be integrated into the different existing regional planning tools. The KEAC reiterates its recommendation that the Kativik Regional Government be consulted and that the *Kativik Regional Master Plan* be taken into account during preparation

of a public land use plan for the Nord-du-Québec region to ensure that it integrates not only areas of economic interest but also areas reserved for conservation and use by Inuit and Naskapi for their traditional activities.

**Objective 2.2: Support processing and the creation of value-added products associated with CSM deposits**

The KEAC supports the proposal to prepare a portrait of existing and future CSM value chains in Québec and the application of resulting circular-economy strategies. The KEAC moreover suggests that clarifications should be provided on how Action 2.2.1 will serve to enhance ecosystem resilience, as asserted in the final sentence of the action.

Action 2.2.4 provides for an assessment of improved funding measures to stimulate CSM industrial processing projects in the regions where extraction is carried out. In Nunavik, these measures should be communicated to all businesses, regional public authorities and groups that promote initiatives adapted to the north.

**Objective 2.3: Enhance multi-user CSM-resource infrastructure and access corridors**

The increase in mineral exploration and mining projects contemplated under the PQDMCS will lead to the construction of transportation infrastructure, which is not overly developed in northern Québec. The KEAC agrees that this infrastructure must be designed to serve more than a single project or a single company. The KEAC reiterates that permafrost thawing and climate change are critical factors that must absolutely be taken into account when planning this infrastructure. A commitment to best environmental practices could be added to the conditions described in Action 2.3.1 for Québec-government investments in multi-user infrastructure projects.

With a view to integrating 4.0 digital technology into future mining projects, Action 2.3.1 underscores the need to upgrade telecommunications infrastructure in remote regions. The KEAC agrees that these upgrading activities should match with the needs of local and Indigenous communities. To permit these populations to benefit from the economic and social spinoffs of the projects implemented in their regions, they must have access to reliable and high-speed telecommunications.

**Objective 2.4: Stimulate the adoption of strategic artificial intelligence initiatives by Québec mining companies**

Under Action 2.4.1, the MERN is proposing to support the creation of stand-alone mines. In fact, the PQDMCS indicates that the automation of mining operations will effect radical changes, namely for workers. The KEAC proposes that the quantity and quality of jobs at stand-alone mine sites be analyzed and fully disclosed, since these jobs are very often the most meaningful spinoffs for communities situated close to mining sites.

**Objective 3.1: Foster the integration of the circular economy into CSM value chains, and Objective 3.2: Encourage the creation of a CSM recycling industry in Québec**

Action 3.2.1 involves increased metal recycling in addition to traditional mineral extraction activities. Under Action 3.1.3, the MERN will also assess CSM potential at former mine sites. The reuse of previously extracted substances will reduce the volume of mine tailings requiring rehabilitation. In line with sustainable development, the KEAC supports the creation and implementation of efficient recycling methods and the reclamation of mine tailings. These two avenues will help maintain CSM deposits intact for future generations. In order to ensure long-term supply, the KEAC is of the opinion that recycling must be prioritized over new mines, even if less profitable in economic terms. The KEAC would like to obtain more information on the MERN's proposed approach to the phasing-in of new mines and the extra time that would be achieved through the implementation of action nos. 3.1.3 and 3.2.1.

The KEAC welcomes the MERN's proposal to assess whether extended producer responsibility regulations can be expanded to new products containing CSM, as described under Action 3.2.2. The KEAC would however like to recall that Nunavik communities do not have sufficient resources to manage the recycling of end-of-life products containing CSM. The implementation of Action 3.2.2 may represent an opportunity for the Québec government to recognize the

shortage of residual materials management infrastructure in the region and to introduce measures towards correcting the situation.

**Objective 3.3: Stimulate the implementation of initiatives to reduce the environmental impacts of CSM mining and reclamation projects**

Power generation in Nunavik is based almost entirely on diesel-powered thermal electric generating plants. Because this production method is a major polluter, regional institutions are searching for ways to achieve greater energy efficiency and to develop a renewable energy supply. It would make sense if related technological innovations in the mining sector under Action 3.3.1 could be put to use for the populations in the region. The PQDMCS might include analysis of technologies that could be transferred from mining sites to the northern villages.

**Objective 4.1: Build awareness among the populations as well as local and Indigenous stakeholders about the issues, impacts and spinoffs of CSM development for Québec and the regions**

The KEAC agrees that the public image of the mining sector is compromised. This is particularly true in Nunavik because certain industry practices have not yet been relegated to the past. Hundreds of abandoned mineral exploration sites are scattered around the region and, although a majority have been cleaned up the Kativik Regional Government in partnership with the Québec government and the mining sector, many new sites are still being discovered. The KEAC proposes that a component targeting industry stakeholders be added to the communications strategy contemplated under Action 4.1.1. This component would serve to build awareness among industry stakeholders about their existing obligations to restore sites and the need for guarantees to ensure compliance with these obligations. It would also serve to reassure populations who know that existing environmental regulations are not being followed.

**Conclusion: Strategic environmental assessment**

Several objectives contained in the PGDMCS aim to determine the best ways to take advantage of available resources while minimizing impacts on the natural and social environments. So that the actions under the PQDMCS enable the Québec government to develop CSM consistently with existing regional planning and with an optimal level of social acceptance, the KEAC is of the opinion that a strategic environmental assessment should be conducted. Section 95.10 of the *Environment Quality Act* stipulates that “[t]he Administration's programs determined by government regulation, including the strategies, plans and other forms of guidelines the Administration develops, must be the subject of a strategic environmental assessment [...].” Strategic environmental assessment integrates environmental and social considerations at the very beginning of the process and enables assessment of solutions for achieving set objectives while minimizing adverse effects.

Strategic environmental assessment contributes to informed decision-making on major government orientations and to public participation through consultations. Strategic environmental assessment would moreover make it possible to clarify linkages with the other plans and strategies of the Québec government, such as the 2019–2024 Action Plan under the *Québec Residual Materials Management Policy* which covers extended producer responsibility and the circular economy.

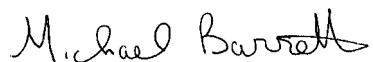
The development of an integrated vision for the transportation, renewable energy and telecommunications network in the north, as proposed under Action 2.3.1 is one element of the PQDMCS that would benefit from strategic environmental assessment. These types of infrastructure projects have tremendous structuring effects, with numerous socio-environmental and cumulative impacts that need to be understood and analyzed in advance. Finally, strategic environmental assessment would provide an opportunity to identify strengths and infrastructure to be developed or consolidated to help northern regions benefit fully from CSM projects.

As the KEAC pointed out in its feedback transmitted to the MERN in February 2020, it must be recalled that Section 23 of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* sets out an environmental and social protection regime to mitigate

the environmental and social impacts of development on Inuit and Naskapi, as well as the region's wildlife resources on which they rely. The protection regime establishes a unique and tested environmental and social impact assessment and review procedure. So, while strategic environmental assessment may influence the planning and management of development projects in Nunavik, it must not modify any aspect or provision of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*.

The KEAC appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback at this second stage of consultations and asks to be kept informed of future developments in this file.

Sincerely,



Michael Barrett  
Chairperson