

My name is Jerry Primrose, I am chief of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. I am very proud to be here with my colleagues and Council, although we have one person that is not here, but it is a dedication that she shows that she wants to be in Nelson House to make sure that she is there when people need her. I talk about Shirley Linklater, our youngest Council member. Also, I thank our community consultants for being here with us, our youth and also our elders. Mr. Chairman, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation's vision statement states, and I quote, "To exercise sovereignty that will sustain a healthy and prosperous future for NCN."

This vision statement is also recognized in our agreement in principle, which was passed by our people. I am very proud of the democratic principles that our First Nation believes in and also applies. At this hearing, political opponents in our First Nation have questioned the legitimacy of our government and our leaders. I want to make very clear that our First Nations Government is duly and properly elected. That has been confirmed by the courts.

Our Government is not only legitimate, it is very responsible and very progressive. We have chosen the future, not the past. As responsible leaders, we have no choice. The Wuskwatim project is very important to us, and we are here not just because of a few Councillors thought it was a good idea. Our NCN membership voted to give us the permission to move forward and explore and frame this project in a way that our First Nation would benefit and that our environment would not be harmed.

People have also tried to say Wuskwatim is similar to CRD and that we are being used by Manitoba Hydro. Let me tell you that this is not CRD. This time around we have been included and intimately involved right from the beginning. Our voice and our ideas and our will have been very much expressed. In Manitoba Hydro, there are new people, new policies and a new approach. This is not the 1970s, this is 2004. Still, many of the people opposing the project have done so on the basis of something that happened 30 years ago. They want to remain stuck in the past. And we cannot do that, we need to look forward, not in the rear view mirror.

So while you have heard some emotional arguments against Wuskwatim by our brothers and sisters from PCN, DRSIL, CASIL, and the MMF, and some environmentalists, we know they have used this forum to further their own agendas. While we can respect them as seekers to pursue their goals, whether it is for independence, recognition, compensation, or other things, their agendas don't relate to this project. We cannot support them by deferring or delaying our plans for the future, nor do we want to be used for their political purposes.

Focusing on the past is not going to be good enough for our children. They can't wait decades for solutions. Their futures and lives are on the line. And the representatives of a majority of First Nations in this Province understand this.

These are leaders who have many of the same challenges as we do, and who have publicly supported our effort to develop Wuskwatim. They include the:

- Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, AMC,
- Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin, or MKO,
- the Southern Chiefs Organization, commonly known as SCO,
- the Chemawawin Cree Nation,
- Mosakahiken Cree Nation,
- Tataskweyak Cree Nation,
- Fox Lake First Nation,
- and also the Swampy Cree Tribal Council.

I would like to express my sincere thanks for their support. They recognize the benefits of Wuskwatim, not only for NCN, Manitoba Hydro, or other Manitobans, but also for Aboriginal residents and communities in the north. They come from a place of knowledge and experience rooted in the Aboriginal Cree culture.

You have also heard from business leaders, local government, unions, and others in support of this project. They include the:

- Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Thompson Chamber of Commerce,
- the mayors of Thompson and The Pas,
- the Manitoba Federation of Labour,
- the Allied Hydro Council of Manitoba,
- the Operating Engineers of Manitoba,
- the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers,
- the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group,
- Inco Limited,
- the Norman Regional Development Corporation,
- North Central Community Futures,
- Northern Association of Community Councils,
- and also the Keewatin Community College.

This broad support from businesses, municipal governments, education and labour has been very important to us and has helped confirm our efforts to bring this project forward to our people.

The Wuskwatim project is modest by Manitoba Hydro's standards, but to the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, it represents a huge opportunity to provide both short term and long lasting benefits and hope for a brighter future for our people.

There are two huge advantages for us:

- One, there will be minimal environmental impacts. The low head design we chose for Wuskwatim will cause the least amount of flooding of any hydroelectric project ever developed in northern Manitoba. The exhaustive environmental studies we have seen show the project will have relatively little impact on nearby land, plants, and animals. Nothing that has been brought forward over the past many weeks has credibly challenged our conclusion in this regard.

- Second, our people have been willing to move forward with this project because there are significant benefits that will flow for our people, training, jobs and long term revenues. Many of the benefits and services we now have are paid for with the money we receive every year from the Federal Government. Much of that funding is fixed, which means there is usually not enough to pay for all the things we need. With our rapidly growing population, these funds are stretched every year, more and more every year. The housing shortage is just one example of where revenues don't meet our needs. Funding for higher education is also fixed, which means we are not able to support everyone who applies.

If Wuskwatim is approved, we believe, based on careful analysis, thoroughly tested in this process that our profits will grow over time. This will allow us to meet the needs of our people much better than we can today. We hope to fill the gaps in government funding and meet the priorities NCN members will set. My hope and my dream is that this will result in a better life for all NCN members now and long into the future. This will give true meaning to thinking of the seven generations, a Cree principle that when we act today, we should be thinking not just for today and ourselves, but a span of seven generations.

Even without Wuskwatim, we would still need to address the needs of our people. We would need to invent another engine for our economic growth and future prosperity.

There have been a lot of critics of Wuskwatim. None of them have offered an alternative to the project that would create the economic growth we need to fund our basic needs.

Yes, there is risk, but these are well-defined and far outweighed by the potential benefits to our people in the short-term and also in the long-term. We believe our conclusions have been supported in this process by the final submissions from the Consumer's Association of Canada, Manitoba Society of Seniors, and we thank them for their fair analysis.

Our Government believes that Wuskwatim is currently the best way to address our challenges, and we are continuing to work to achieve the best possible deal for our people.

There are some who have unfavourably compared the SOU with the Peace of the Braves Agreement signed by the Government of Quebec and the nine Cree Nations in 2002. In fact, these two agreements are not comparable, as you have heard in evidence. We met several years ago with Quebec's Grand Chief, Dr. Ted Moses, Grand Council of the Crees, to share our experiences. Ours is a business partnership between our nation and Manitoba Hydro in regard to a single, small hydro project. The Peace of the Braves is a comprehensive

economic, social, and cultural agreement between the Provincial Government and the governing authority for the Crees of Quebec. It deals with all the resources in the area, including forestry, mining, and hydroelectric development. The proposed development in Quebec involves five dams and over 800 square kilometres of flooding. Compare this agreement to our SOU, it is like comparing a muskrat to a caribou herd. There is no comparison, no valid thoughtful comparison can be made.

We would like to thank the secretary, Rory Grewar, for his patience, his helpfulness and respectfulness in this process. We would also thank everybody, especially the critics and people who have been saying negative comments about Chief and Council of NCN. Critics are our best teachers for they keep us in balance in our minds and also our harmonious nature. We have no enemies. The only enemy we have is time itself. Time waits for no man in this journey.

In conclusion, we want to thank the Commissioners for listening and hearing our proposals and also our concerns. The sound of Cree language has been music to our ears, even though some of the arguments might not have been in agreement to us. Our First Nation has learned and grown from this experience, and I am convinced we are much stronger and very much wiser because of this. I also want to acknowledge Manitoba Hydro for its efforts in working alongside of us. I want to thank all our NCN Future Development Team, including co-managers Norman Linklater and Marcel Moody. Also, I also would like to thank our elders for standing beside us, our community consultants, our legal and technical advisers. And also I guess all the Council members that are here with me for their support, participation, and patience in this major initiative. As leaders of NCN we have gone through tremendous pressures, personal attacks and so forth. Personally, I have been taken to court twice for a peace bond application. You know, I want to tell you, even all through that, we have been very cool as Council members, and I would like to thank the Council members for that. You know, we have not adversely reacted to any of the negative comments. But, you know, we are after all only human beings and sometimes it has been hard.

I also want to thank all NCN members, both here and also at home, for their patience in this process. I guess lastly, but not least, I would like to thank our Council member, Elvis Thomas, who is a portfolio holder for Future Development, who led this process for NCN. He has shown great dedication and commitment in keeping this process on track, and it has allowed me as Chief to attend the needs of my community and its NCN members. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Commissioners, this has been a very difficult process for us. People don't know and don't see, maybe don't even hear sometimes. I would like to thank you as Chairman and also Commissioners for your extraordinary patience in this process. As an individual, as a human being, I only think, jeez, I can't even sit for 20 minutes in one spot and listen to all this technical

information. And for the commitment you have shown, it has been tremendous, it has been real, for me a blessing to see that, because I think you have been very serious, and we thank you for that from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you.

Ekosi.