

THE HONOURABLE SHANE THOMPSON
MINISTER OF LANDS

Project Assessment Policy Review

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Frame Lake on March 10, 2022, regarding the Project Assessment Policy.

As shared with Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment, the review of the Project Assessment Policy is underway. The Department of Lands is working with all GNWT departments to review and discuss questions and concerns about the Policy, and to develop recommended revisions for Executive Council's consideration. Department of Lands anticipates meeting the timelines set out in the workplan.

1. How the review will address the criticism that the whole-of-government approach muzzles scientists and subject experts, preventing their presentation of evidence vital to the identification and assessment of environmental effects?

The GNWT recognizes that concerns have been expressed about whether the 'whole of government' approach hinders the ability of departmental scientists and other experts to provide evidence to environmental assessment bodies when GNWT projects are being assessed. As committed to in the responses to the Tłıchǫ All-season Road lessons learned report, which is available on the Department's website, the review of the Policy will include a review of the whole of government concept, as well as other relevant approaches and the development of a process for evaluating and determining the approach best suited to each individual GNWT project. This evaluation will take into account the nature of the project, the views of Indigenous governments involved in the project, the views of any co-proponents, the requirements of the relevant environmental assessment and regulatory regime(s), and other relevant factors. As stated in the responses to the lessons learned, the

GNWT commits to make public the approach and supporting rationale that is taken for any given project.

The review of the Policy includes consideration of how to better communicate the intent of the Policy, which is to give a voice to the full scope of the GNWT's mandate and to support interdepartmental discussion among scientists and other subject matter experts. Given the interdisciplinary nature of impact assessment, such discussion is important to the GNWT's ability to provide unified and complete submissions to environmental assessment bodies.

The review of the Policy is based on the understanding that individual GNWT departments are accountable for the content of their contributions to GNWT's submissions to environmental assessment bodies. This is currently set out in provision 5(c) of the Policy, which confirms that the Policy respects individual Ministers' authorities under Establishment Policies and legislation.

2. The timeline for completion of the review of the Project Assessment Policy?

As set out in the workplan for the Policy Review, the timeline for completion is December 2022.

3. How the review will provide opportunities for public engagement into the review of the Project Assessment Policy including reporting of public input and GNWT responses?

The workplan for the Project Assessment Policy review does not include plans for broad engagement. However, the review will incorporate the input received within the independently prepared Tłıchǫ All-season Road Lessons Learned Report, input from all departments, who represent a broad range of public interests; as well as input from Standing Committee, in accordance with the Process Conventions of the Legislative Assembly.

4. How the input of Indigenous governments and co-management bodies will be solicited and incorporated into any revisions to the Project Assessment Policy?

The workplan for the Project Assessment Policy review does not include plans for broad engagement. However, the review will incorporate the input received within the independently prepared Tłıchǫ All-Season Road Lessons Learned Report, which included input from co-management bodies and Indigenous governments. Additional input from Indigenous governments, in accordance with the Intergovernmental Agreement of the Intergovernmental Council, may also be considered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker