



Alternatives North

Mr. Robert McLeod
Premier, Northwest Territories
Government of the Northwest Territories
Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

28 February 2019

DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY

Dear Premier McLeod:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Northwest Territories Chapter in the federal government's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework document. Your government is to be complimented for its effort to allow civil society to play a role in the development of this critical document.

By way of an initial observation we note that the introductory chapter and the NWT chapter in the document appear to reflect quite different priorities. The introductory chapter starts with a focus on resilient and healthy people before moving on to issues relating to infrastructure, economy and environment. In contrast, the NWT chapter is largely focused on large infrastructure projects and continued non-renewable resource development, paying little mind to the other matters that northerners prioritise.

In fact, the NWT chapter does not reflect the ideas and priorities recounted in the reports of three roundtable public consultation sessions that were undertaken:

1. Re: Indigenous Government
https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/content/2018-02-23_apf_-_what_we_heard_-_indigenous_governments.pdf
2. Re: Non-Governmental Organisations
https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/content/2018-02-02_apf_-_what_we_heard_-_ngos_2.pdf
3. Re: Industry and Business
https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/content/2018-02-02_apf_-_what_we_heard_-_industry_and_business_2.pdf

We note that the NWT chapter focuses on “sustainable growth” rather than “sustainable development.” To Alternatives North, the idea of sustainable development holds more promise to the long-range health and well being of the people and lands of the NWT than does the oxymoronic concept of sustainable growth. This is especially clear now in these times of imminent climate calamity and general environmental decline. We would much prefer that the concept of sustainability underpin the policy and recommend it be so.

It is also notable that the NWT chapter is quite pessimistic about economic decline. But context is very important. The reality is that the diamond mines are coming to the end of their natural life. This is beyond anyone’s control. The chapter correctly notes that nearly 50% of diamond mining industry jobs are filled by people from outside the NWT. Although the NWT may have little or no control over commodities selling into the world market, it does have control over the operation of mines within its territory. The GNWT has failed to find ways to fairly distribute benefits across the NWT and across generations of mining operations that have seen more than \$30 billion of diamonds produced and exported. Of this, our NWT Heritage Fund has retained only about \$17 million. Not only does the chapter fail to prescribe needed solutions to this state of affairs, it suggests more of the same. The first item listed as an economic diversification initiative is subsidies for further non-renewable resource development. With this vision the NWT will remain on the same trajectory, dependent on and exploited by international corporations and at the mercy of world commodities markets.

Alternatives North sees a different, better way forward. The chapter should:

1. Propose concrete economic diversification strategies to seize and develop available sustainable opportunities, especially in the Knowledge Economy with the prospect of a polytechnic university for the NWT and the Conservation Economy, with opportunities such as Thaidene Nene;
(An example of this is found in our report for the Sahtu region found at this link: <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/alternatives-north-sahtu-full-report-jan-14-2016-web-reduced.pdf>)
2. Plan for an enhanced role for youth in our future, one that will challenge them to live healthy and productive lives – to be all that they can be;
3. Acknowledge and address shifting demographics in the NWT, including the needs and aspirations of the growing number of seniors, and the migration of people from smaller to larger communities;
4. Make housing a central priority for public infrastructure spending; and
5. Expand access to the technological infrastructure by extending the fibre link to all of the communities along the current line that are still not connected, not just Tuktoyaktuk.

Once again, Alternatives North thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the draft chapter in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework relating to the NWT. We hope that the comments provided by the GNWT to the federal government will incorporate these ideas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben McDonald', written in a cursive style.

Ben McDonald
For Alternatives North

- c. The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Northern Affairs and Internal Trade