

2017/18 & 2018/19 Manitoba Hydro Electric General Rate Application

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Undertaking #69

AMC to provide advice in the event that there are future steps related to bill assistance directed by the Board on appropriate mechanisms for engagement with First Nations and First Nation political organizations.

Response

By way of context, the AMC represents the interests of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba. Manitoba Hydro's infrastructure has adversely impacted many of the AMC's member First Nations. This infrastructure has destroyed or severely affected the ability of First Nations to live off the land, leaving many of them living in poverty. By and large, Manitoba Hydro's presence on First Nations' traditional lands is without their free, prior and informed consent. Resolving this situation will take concerted efforts, many of which are beyond the scope of what the Public Utilities Board can do. The AMC expects respectful efforts by the Crown, including Crown institutions like the Public Utilities Board, to engage directly with AMC member nations on a nation-to-nation basis on the issues related to Manitoba Hydro including rates and energy use.

In the process of setting electricity rates within the Province and when engaging First Nations, Manitoba Hydro and the Public Utilities Board must always remember that the preponderance of Hydro's infrastructure is on First Nations lands without their consent. Furthermore, the Province of Manitoba has interpreted First Nation - Crown Treaties in a way that denies economic benefit from traditional lands and perpetuates poverty.

In addition, Manitoba Hydro and the Public Utilities Board should become informed on how electricity rates impact AMC member nations, especially low-income people living on and off reserve. Doing this effectively will require more than consulting spreadsheets and databases. The lived experiences of First Nation citizens on and off reserve may tell a very different story than that understood by Manitoba Hydro. When considering the needs of First Nations people, the impact of their bills must be considered within the economic context of on reserve communities. Similarly, Manitoba Hydro's programs, such as energy efficiency programs, may need to be redesigned to better take into account the lack of comparable First Nation on reserve infrastructure to non-First Nation off reserve infrastructure. Meaningful and effective engagement with people working at the First Nation community level is required to collect information on these topics.

The AMC encourages Hydro to do more to continue to build trust and better relationships with its member nations. In many cases, this will require providing First Nations with resources to hire community members and outside technicians to assist in enhancing capacity. When

Manitoba Hydro shows up to our communities with engineers, consultants and technicians, First Nation governments may require technical assistance to properly engage. If Manitoba Hydro is truly interested in the perspectives of First Nations, it must acknowledge that capacity funding is required to enable them to articulate their views in terms that Manitoba Hydro can understand.

We also acknowledge that in some instances, it may be useful and of additional benefit for the AMC to collect information from First Nations and for the AMC to liaise and work directly with Hydro. For instance, the AMC Chiefs in Assembly did resolve in the past for the AMC to undertake a comparative research study on the fee rating system imposed by Manitoba Hydro on First Nations communities versus non-First Nation communities. Unfortunately, the AMC did not receive any funding to conduct such research and currently has very limited resources, and cannot provide an effective First Nation regional role with Hydro. However, if provided with the resources, the AMC would be willing to enhance its capacity in order to liaise with Hydro, and collect the relevant and necessary information on energy use and conservation that would better enable the targeting of rates and programs to serve First Nations in Manitoba.