



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 27, 2025

MKO Warns Against “National Interest” Projects Without Indigenous-Led Framework to Protect Rights and Communities

Treaty Five Territory, Pimicikamak Cree Nation - June 27, 2025 - In response to the advancement of Bill C-5 Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) is calling on the federal government apply the same urgency to develop an effective national regulatory infrastructure that truly upholds Indigenous rights and ensures benefit sharing before moving forward with any projects deemed to be in the “national interest.”

“First Nations in northern Manitoba have more than 70 years of real-world experience and ‘lessons learned’ with major energy, resource and infrastructure projects in our traditional territories,” said Grand Chief Garrison Settee. “These developments have deeply impacted every aspect of our lives—from our cultural practices and land connections to our ability to exercise constitutionally protected rights. The Building Canada Act risks repeating this pattern, under a new name.”

MKO has told the Prime Minister, Minister LeBlanc, CIRNAC Minister Alty and every Member of Parliament and Senator that Canada currently does not have a trusted or enforceable process to ensure that Indigenous rights are protected and will be meaningfully exercised and that communities will receive lasting benefits. Critically, The Building Canada Act also enables the federal government to fast-track projects without the planning phase of the Impact Assessment Act (IAA); a key forum for First Nations engagement and dialogue.

MKO has proposed an urgent and focused co-development initiative with the Minister of Justice, the Privy Council Office, and Justice Canada to apply MKO’s 70 years of “lessons learned” to address this systemic gap and meet Canada’s constitutional obligations to Indigenous peoples.

MKO is calling on the Government of Canada to work collaboratively on creating a national regulatory framework that ensures:

1. Full and effective recognition of First Nations rights, including the Duty to Consult and Accommodate
2. Enforceable and transparent mechanisms for benefit sharing
3. Affirmation of First Nations’ ability to meaningfully exercise their rights on the land.

“There is no nation-wide process—carried out by government as a whole—that reliably ensures that the meaningful exercise of our rights is respected and protected. The Crown’s constitutional obligation to engage the Duty to Consult before approving a national interest project must not be reduced to a procedural box-checking exercise,” Grand Chief Settee stated. “Any approval of ‘national interest’ projects must include enforceable conditions that reflect our rights and our role as decision-makers on our lands and fully uphold the Treaty promises of the Crown.”

For more information:

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Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba's North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.

