

0:04: Hello everyone

0:05: Welcome to our public information session on the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area.

0:11: My name is David Toro. I'm a junior policy analyst for the Impact Assessment Agency, the team working on this assessment.

0:22: Before we get started, I do want to clarify because this question has come up, that this is a public information session, but it does not constitute consultation.

0:34: Also, I would like to start with a land acknowledgement. I myself, I am located on the unceded indigenous lands of Tiohtià:ke or Montreal. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of these lands and the waters on which I am located today and on which I live. Tiohtià:ke is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations and I myself I do want to express I'm very grateful to be able to live on these lands and to be able to enjoy these lands and these waters

1:12: Also, I would like to extend my land acknowledgement to the partners in this assessment from the Matawa and Mushkegowuk communities that are co-leading the Regional Assessment.

1:26: This assessment is based in the Ring of Fire area, which is located on Treaty 9 territory, also known as the James Bay Treaty by some.

1:37: The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada recognizes the ties that these communities have to the lands and the and the waters of the region and we're very grateful to be able to co-lead this Regional Assessment with these communities.

1:57: So, going over the agenda for the meeting, we will go over Regional Assessments in a general sense. What are regional assessments? What are they usually used for?

2:12: We will go there into detail more specifically about what is the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire area and then we'll go into to some updates on work that we've been doing. We will go over the Maajitao/Majitata, which is a workplan document outlining the deliverables and the activities that we're working on for the rest of the regional assessment.

2:41: There is the Roster of Expert Supports.

2:44: We will talk about Public Participation. The opportunities to participate and also participant funding that's available for the public to be able to participate in the assessment.

2:58: And we'll end with Next Steps to look at what we are working on in the next few months and in the next couple of years for the assessment.

3:11: So, first, what are regional assessments, in the in the general sense?

3:16: I know that many of you are probably quite familiar with impact assessments, also called environmental assessments, specifically at provincial level.

3:29: It is very important to stress the regional assessments and impact assessments are different tools with different goals, and an impact assessment or environmental assessment is a planning and decision-making tool that is used to assess the potential positive and negative effects of a particular development project.

3:50: At the federal level it is designated projects that are evaluated through impact assessments and generally they are major projects such as mines, highways, oil infrastructure, bridges, hydroelectric dams. So, major major projects that get evaluated to look at the impacts and potential mitigation measures.

4:16: On the other hand, regional assessments, they are also a planning tool that looks at positive and negative effects. But instead of looking at a specific project, it looks at multiple activities in a region, whether it's past activities that continue to have impacts and have shaped the region, but also existing activities and potential future activities that can impact the region. So, the focus with regional assessments is to look at cumulative effects at a regional scale and by looking at not a single project but the regional context at a regional level.

4:58: The idea is to provide a more comprehensive analysis that helps inform future impact assessments when they happen for specific projects and also other decision-making processes for development in the region. Regional assessments focus on bigger effects that are often challenging to address at project level assessments and decisions. And regional assessments must be considered according to the law when future impact assessments happen in the region where the regional assessment took place.

5:37: The Impact Assessment Agency has completed 3 regional assessments to date.

5:45: There was a Regional Assessment of Offshore Oil and Gas Exploratory Drilling in Newfoundland and Labrador and there was the two Regional Assessments of Offshore Wind Development that happened in Newfoundland and Labrador as well and in Nova Scotia. Those are the three that have been completed.

6:03: And there's also two regional assessments that are currently in pRAWGress. There is this assessment, the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area and also the Regional Assessment in the Saint Lawrence River Area, which is currently in the planning place.

6:21: So now that we have the context of regional assessments in in a more general sense, let's look specifically at this Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire.

6:33: This is a process that is being co-led between 15 First Nations and the Impact Assessment Agency.

6:41: Collectively we're known as the Regional Assessment Working Group or the RAWG for short. You will hear RAWG quite often and and that refers to the Regional Assessment Working Group that is leading the Regional Assessment.

6:57: The RAWG consists of community members from every First Nation partner that is at the table, and these are delegates that have been appointed by their Chief or their Chief and Council.

7:12: And the other members are representatives from the Impact Assessment Agency who have diverse experience or experience relevant to conducting regional assessments and knowledge of the First Nations context, specifically the First Nation context in this region.

7:28: You can see the list here of all the partners, it's quite a long list. There's 15 nations and it's all these First Nations and the federal government that sit at the RAWG.

7:45: So, let's go over some of the, the context, some of the history that have led to where we are now.

7:53: It starts in in 2019 when Aroland First Nation made a request and a recommendation to conduct a regional assessment in the region.

8:03: And this was followed up but by more requests from NGOs that were recommending to the Minister of Environment that a that a regional assessment be conducted in the James Bay Lowlands area due to the potential for mineral development in this region.

8:23: A few months after that, in February of 2020, the Minister of Environment did determine that a regional assessment was warranted due to the significant potential impacts that development in the Ring of Fire area would have on Aboriginal and treaty rights, on traditional land use, on socio economic conditions, health and well-being, community well-being and such.

8:49: Then by the next year, by the end of 2021, a joint federal and provincial draft Terms of Reference were released. Meaning Canada and provincially, Ontario. But First Nations in

the area did emphasize the need for equal participation and for a co-developed approach in which first nations could be partners in the process.

9:14: So, in 2022, the year after that, Chiefs of Matawa and Mushkegowuk member communities, they recommended a collective approach to the regional assessment, which led in early 2023, the Minister of Environment to meet with First Nation leaders to discuss what this collective approach could look like.

9:41: And the requirements for a co-developed regional assessment that is co-led in full partnership.

9:49: The requirements for this kind of process were ironed out and were agreed to, which led to the establishment of the RAWG which was established to lead the assessment and to co-develop draft Terms of Reference starting in 2024, which were then finalized by 2025 in January this year and posted publicly.

10:18: So, we've mentioned Terms of Reference. It is worth clarifying what are the Terms of Reference.

10:24: This is a document that provides direction and specifies the duties and the mandate that the RAWG has to follow to conduct this Regional Assessment. The Terms of Reference were finalized by the First Nation partners and the Minister of Environment, as I said in January of this year.

10:46: It's worth clarifying that regional assessments only have two phases, which is different from impact assessment. There is the planning phase and the conduct phase.

10:58: So, the planning phase, it's mostly about determining what the Terms of Reference will be, developing them and finalizing them.

11:07: And once the Terms of Reference are finalized, the planning phase is considered finished and the conduct phase starts, which is where we're at now in our process.

11:16: We are fully in the conduct phase now since the Terms of Reference have been finalized.

11:23: Very important as well to go through the Guiding Principles that ground this Regional Assessment before moving forward. The idea behind these principles is to reflect our short commitment to a process that is respectful, inclusive and forward-looking.

11:45: The first of these guiding principles is around Indigenous values being at the forefront.

11:53: First and foremost, Indigenous values, interest and priorities are placed at the center of this assessment. So, it's about more than just considering these values is about placing them on the foundation of the process.

12:07: And this means also shaping or letting the process be shaped by the perspectives, the languages and the worldviews of the First Nation partners.

12:18: Second is being collaborative and co-led.

12:22: This is not a top-down process, it is a co-led process by 15 First Nation partners and the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada working together through the RAWG to make decisions jointly as a group, together.

12:40: 3rd is the integration of knowledge systems. We are weaving together Indigenous Knowledge Systems that are rooted in tradition, in natural law, and lived experience, with Western knowledge and Western science.

12:53: The idea is to have this interdisciplinary approach that ensures a more holistic understanding of the region and also of the people who live in this region and who are most likely to be impacted by the development in the region.

13:09: 4th is a shared understanding of sustainability.

13:14: So, we're aiming to do work that is grounded in a shared definition of sustainability.

13:20: It's a definition that includes intergenerational perspectives like the 7th generation teachings to help us think in the long term and to and to think responsibly of our responsibilities to future generations.

13:36: Next is a renewed relationship and reconciliation.

13:40: This assessment is also about creating and building a relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. A relationship that is based on mutual respect, on recognition of rights and on true partnership.

13:56: And the idea is to support reconciliation through every step in in the process.

14:02: 6th is knowledge sharing and capacity building.

14:06: We are creating opportunities to build and to share knowledge and this has to include, of course, supporting First Nation Partners in conducting studies and being able to contribute meaningfully to the final report of the assessment.

14:22: Next is transparency and accessibility.

14:25: Transparency, it's very important for this process and we're committed to making the process and outcomes as accessible as possible to all and to the public, while at the same time respecting the confidentiality and then the sensitivity of Indigenous knowledge.

14:43: 8th is meaningful participation.

14:45: So, we do aim to maximize opportunities for meaningful participation, not just from Indigenous communities, but also from the public, from experts, from other stakeholders as well.

15:00: And last but certainly not least is respect for traditional knowledge.

15:06: Traditional knowledge, natural law and customs and ceremony are not just included or considered, but they're very much at the foundation of the process and they're central to the assessment.

15:21: And again, very important for First Nation Partners to be able to retain right to control access to their traditional knowledge.

15:29: These principles, they're not just words, as I've been saying, they're meant to be the foundation of the work that we're doing together and how we're making decisions and how we're moving forward.

15:42: And they aim to ensure that the assessment truly reflects the views and the communities of that are being impacted by the development or that stand to be impacted by the development.

16:03: In terms of the operational structure of the Regional Assessment, which is specified in Section 8 of the Terms of Reference, we have this art, this turtle art, which was developed by one of our delegates in the RAWG, by Harry Papa.

16:21: It explains the structure of everyone who's involved in the assessment.

16:29: At the very center is the Working Group, which is comprised of First Nations in the region and the federal government working together through the RAWG and around it is all the bodies and people who are supporting the assessment that are involved in the assessment.

16:47: There's the expert support roster, which we will go into in more detail. There's other government departments and ministries, there's administrative support, there's Indigenous peoples and the public and so on. All the bodies that are involved in the assessment.

17:07: So, three of the main parts of this turtle diagram and of this assessment are: 1) the RAWG, which as I've been saying is composed of First Nation communities and member representatives of the Impact Assessment Agency.

17:26: Its responsibilities include guiding operations, using appropriate cultural protocols and collecting, storing, and processing data and knowledge. And producing reports and conducting studies that are deemed necessary.

17:42: The RAWG meets regularly and the meetings are structured as round table discussions to ensure equal voice for each delegate, and also invited community members that they come to the meetings: Elders, youth and other council members and land users

18:02: The RAWG supports and respects Indigenous cultural practices and it's encouraged that cultural practices are used in meetings as well, such as beginning the meetings with opening prayer, closing with prayer as well, and ceremony. Offerings and smudging are welcomed and encouraged as well.

18:23: There's the administrative support, which has been key as part of the process.

18:29: It is provided by staff from the Matawa and Mushkegowuk Tribal councils, whether to support delegates and the group as a whole with administrative work, and also by the Impact System Agency, which also supports administrative necessities.

18:47: And also an independent facilitator who has been hired to support the RAWG and to ensure that there is a neutral voice that guides discussion among the group.

18:58: There's also Chiefs and Minister who represent the leadership of the partners in the process.

19:05: The Chiefs and the Minister will meet to discuss the final report and the findings and the recommendations in this report.

19:14: And the Minister has also committed to issue a written response that will be made public through the Impact Assessment Agency's website.

19:23: All the information that comes out of this process will be made public. As I said, respecting confidentiality and sensitivity of Indigenous knowledge.

19:37: In terms of the assessment location for this process, in this map that you can see here there are two areas that are shown. This purple patch that you can see here with the dashed square, that's the development area, which is the area known as Ring of Fire as well, which specifies the underlying geological formations where there's mineral deposits that could be developed into a mining activity.

20:15: This is the area that's likely to see the most industrial development and the most mining activity, however the assessment focuses holistically on the assessment area which is shown in in the green line here.

20:29: This green line is not a hard boundary because effects, you know, are not contained specifically in specific regions so easily.

20:43: And the idea of the assessment area is that both the impacts that happen in the development area, but also the associated infrastructure that will come will be spread throughout the entire region.

20:56: So, the assessment here includes the traditional territories over the First Nation Partners and the region that's most likely to experience impacts from development in the Ring of Fire.

21:12: But as I've said, it's worth pointing out, this is not a hard line, this green line. Studies and consideration can vary depending on how impacts are modelled.

21:27: So that was the overview of our Regional Assessment and what we've been working on in the Terms of Reference.

21:37: Now we will go over the Maajitao/Majitata, which is a work plan we've developed specifying the key deliverables and the key activities to be completed during the conduct phase of the regional assessment.

21:56: You can see this diagram, we call it the blueberry diagram. Clearly, it's not a traditional government document, it's meant to be culturally relevant, and it has been made public.

22:10: This is posted on the registry, the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry, the site for our Regional Assessment.

22:17: So, the blueberry represents the timelines in a way. At the very center is the Terms of Reference, which is where the seeds are, and also represents the planning phase of the Regional Assessment.

22:35: And then as a blueberry builds out, it shows the different stages of the process.

22:41: So, you can see here the green dots show the main deliverables that need to be completed. And there's the list here on the left.

22:55: There's things such as the work plan, which we're looking at right now, this has been completed.

23:01: The charter , for which the draft has been finalized; the roster of expert supports has been finalized too; the participation plan was posted publicly last month in June.

23:12: And the star here represents where we are in the process.

23:16: So we've completed the Terms of Reference, we've completed the planning phase, we moved on, we're fully in the contact phase now.

23:23: And the next deliverables that you can see here are what we're working on. The information sharing platform and the interim report, we'll give more details on those later on.

23:35: So those are the deliverables and down here in the list in the blue or the arrows here are the ongoing activities.

23:47: So, these are activities that are not a deliverable with a specific date, but are something that's ongoing throughout the assessment, such as engagement with expert supports and with government experts.

24:02: There's community engagement, which has been happening throughout and will continue to happen, public engagement such as this session that we're having and the meetings of the RAWG, the Regional Assessment Working Group, which we've been doing since the very start of the process and will continue throughout.

24:23: I did mention the roster of expert supports a couple times.

24:27: So, what this is, according to Sections 9.3 and 9.4 of the Terms of Reference, we've established a roster of subject matter experts that can support and help with the regional assessment.

24:43: This was done in in May of this year, of 2025, and we have over 90 individuals organizations in the roster.

24:55: The Terms of Reference define expert supports as individuals or groups of individuals (organizations) who have expertise, knowledge or experience relevant to the conduct of the regional assessment, which includes, but it's not limited to, community and traditional knowledge holders, elders, technical and scientific experts, and legal experts.

25:19: So, this roster is full of individuals and organizations who have knowledge, who have experience that can contribute and that can help with the Regional Assessment.

25:33: We're seeking advice and support from this roster.

25:37: And I do want to point out. The roster, we went looking outside of the First Nation partner communities.

25:47: We do already have a lot of expertise and a lot of knowledge, Elders and knowledge holders in the partner communities.

25:55: So, the idea was to look outside towards people, towards organizations we might not be aware about or we might not have connections with. But both are contributing in the assessment.

26:09: Whether it's experts that are from communities or experts that we found outside, they'll have their roles to play.

26:20: So, as I've said, it was established in May and, and May 1st of, of this year.

26:27: And three main things to consider around the roster of expert supports.

26:31: This first is the roles and responsibilities of the roster.

26:37: Expert supports will assist with many tasks such as collecting and interpreting data, providing scientific information and reviewing scientific information and reports, identifying knowledge gaps, analyzing reports, analyzing data, informing sections of the of the reports, attending engagement sessions, leading sessions too especially workshops with the RAWG - technical advisory sessions.

27:11: The topics that the expert supports will help with and that the RAWG is seeking advice on are quite varied and in depends on the needs of the RAWG.

27:23: But they include environmental, health, cultural, spiritual, social, socio economic conditions as well as knowledge of the potential impacts of development activities

27:38: In terms of the procurement of these experts, experts can be can be procured by the Impact Assessment Agency or by individual partners when we have priorities that are shared by every single partner in the table, such as scenario development.

27:59: Usually the Impact Assessment Agency handles the procurement of experts for help.

28:04: But individual partners are also free to choose who they wish to work with according to their needs in the assessment.

28:14: Any of the partners individually in groups or all of them together can reach out to and seek help from expert supports.

28:26: Now, in terms of public participation, there are quite a few opportunities for the public to participate and there was a Participation Plan that was posted publicly on June 19th that is available our site, in the Impact Assessment Registry.

28:49: The participation plan ensures that Indigenous peoples and the public are informed about opportunities for participation.

28:58: It encourages the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and cultural considerations and promotes engagement with different parts of the community, including women, including youth, including elders too and it seeks to enhance and ensure participation at key stages in the process.

29:21: There's many different tools and different avenues for participation for the public.

29:28: There is the roster of expert supports which we just talked about, the Call for Information which we'll touch on later.

29:36: There has been and will continue to be comment periods for key documents from the process.

29:44: There's information sessions such as the one we're having right now, updates over e-mail and social media, an information sharing platform which we'll also touch on shortly, and participant funding as well.

30:01: So participant funding is funding that is meant to help build capacity so Indigenous peoples, members of the public, organizations have the capacity and the resources to meaningfully engage and participate in the process.

30:19: Applications are currently open for funding. Applications are being received and are open until July 21st of this year of the 2025.

30:34: This funding can cover expenses such as staff salaries, administrative costs, legal fees, professional fees, travel expenses, a lot of the things that organizations or First Nation governments, Indigenous governments might need to meaningfully engage and to be able to participate in the process.

30:59: We do have an e-mail specifically for participant funding.

31:04: We do encourage you to reach out with any questions or clarifications to this e-mail at the bottom of the page here, which we have for from our funding team. Do feel free to reach out.

31:18: We have staff that will be happy to answer any questions.

31:24: The Call for Information is another opportunity to participate, which we mentioned earlier.

31:31: As we are collecting data and information as part of this process, we're also seeking help from the public to help us supplement all the research that we're doing.

31:46: We're collecting a data catalog with information and data that is relevant to the region, that is relevant to the assessment and to the communities that they live in the region.

31:59: We're asking the public to help us provide information so we can have access to information we might not be aware about.

32:10: We're doing a Call for Information encouraging and asking the public for further information, datasets, things like this.

32:20: And we're seeking information on various topics including wildlife and wildlife habitat, fish and fish habitat, peatlands, forests and other relevant ecosystems, local geology and hydrology, physical and cultural heritage, oral histories, and other forms of community knowledge, socioeconomic conditions.

32:44: All manner of topics that are relevant to the assessment, relevant to the communities in the region. Interested parties who have something to provide will be asked to fill out contact information and a table with their information to be submitted through e-mail.

33:05: This call hasn't been released yet, but it will be released shortly in the next few days.

33:10: And again, as I said, the idea is to help us supplement the list of information we're already working to collect.

33:22: And I do want to point out. If you do have non digitized data or studies that you think are relevant things that only exist physically, not digitally, please do reach out and let us know and we'll see how we can help digitize this to make it part of the assessment to be considered and to have it in the information sharing platform.

33:46: So, in terms of next steps, the things that we're working on the next few months are the scenario development, we're modelling what different scenarios of development could look like, different intensities of development and what the impacts could be.

34:05: We're moving forward with, with community and public engagement.

34:10: It's something we'll be working on the summer and this fall and then continuing after that too.

34:17: But it's, it's a priority for the next few months, the information sharing platform that I've mentioned, this will be a repository of information where people can access data and information from the Regional Assessment.

34:33: But apart from just raw data, it will also have interactive tools for people to visualize.

34:38: There will be interactive maps, story maps as well.

34:43: You can think of it as a hub for relevant information for people to learn about the Regional Assessment.

34:51: This is something that we're working on all through the summer and the fall as well to have at least a basic version to share with the public.

35:01: And the interim report, which will be a report in which we will share updates and progress of what has been completed and what has been made progress on to date in the assessment.

35:13: That will be published in January of next year in 2026.

35:23: And lastly, just to close up an end is our contact information.

35:29: We do definitely encourage you to reach out with any questions, any comments that you have.

35:35: We have our main e-mail here.

35:38: This is our main inbox that you can reach out to. If you do have questions specific about the funding, I do request that you reach out to this e-mail, the participant funding e-mail, so the folks from the funding team can help you with your requests, and for any media requests, we also have an e-mail for that as well.

35:59: As I said, definitely encourage you to reach out with comments, with questions.

36:06: We'll be happy to help out with any of those and do want to thank you for taking the time to listen, to learn about what we're doing, the work that we're progressing on.

36:22: We will be having more of these sessions moving forward. Looking forward to seeing you there as well.

36:30: And yes, again, thank you for your time and for listening and hope you have a great rest of your day.

36:35: Thank you.