

Federal Environmental and Regulatory Processes for Stornoway Diamond Corporation's Renard Diamond Mine Project

Context

The federal environmental assessment process under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012* is the primary public and Aboriginal consultation mechanism used by the federal government to consult on proposed mine development projects. In fact, the federal environmental assessment process is designed to be an effective tool to:

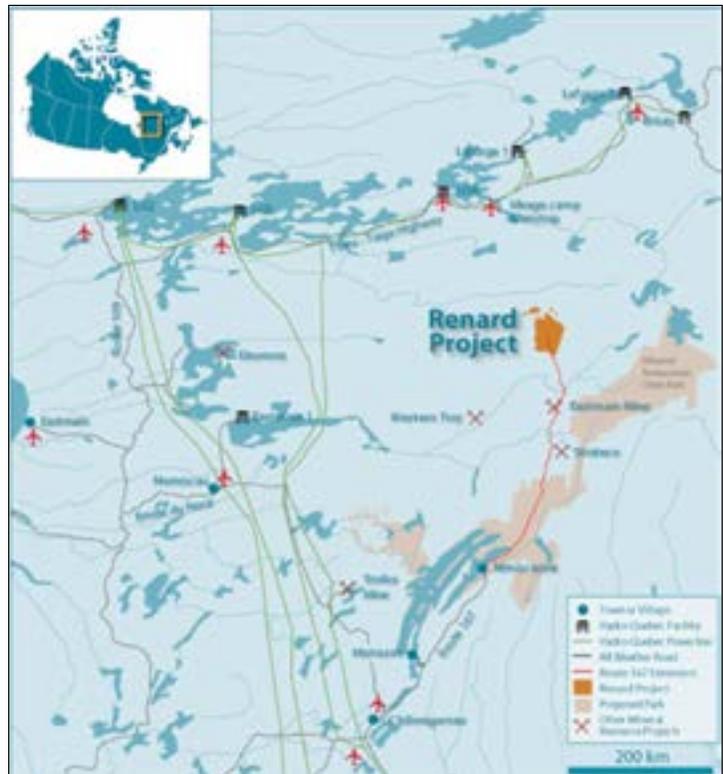
- Understand the effects of the project on the current use of lands and resources for traditional Aboriginal purposes;
- Understand potential impacts on Aboriginal rights and ensure mitigation is considered to address impacts; and
- Use Aboriginal traditional knowledge to better understand the environmental effects of the project for improved project planning.

A case in point is the federal environmental assessment of the Renard diamond mine project that was completed in 2013. Stornoway Diamond Corporation's (Stornoway) flagship asset is located near the Otish Mountains in north-central Quebec, 250 km from the Cree Nation of Mistissini, and will become Quebec's first diamond mine.

Description of Measures Implemented

In meeting federal environmental assessment and regulatory requirements, and because the Renard project is located on lands where the Cree Nation have specific hunting, fishing, and trapping rights set out in the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, Stornoway worked with the federal government, the Grand Council of the Crees, and the Cree Nation of Mistissini to identify and mitigate potential environmental effects. One of the first steps was the creation of the Environmental Exchange Group (EEG) established in October 2010. Even today, this informal forum is used by stakeholders to exchange information on different aspects of the project.

Pre-exploration	Exploration	Development	Operation	Closure	Post-closure
Leads: Government (GoC), industry (Que.)					
Step of the Mineral Development Sequence: Development					
Key Finding: Incorporating Aboriginal traditional knowledge in project planning can result in beneficial outcomes for both parties. In that regard, the federal environmental assessment and regulatory processes can serve as a starting point for communication and dialogue between mine proponents and Aboriginal communities.					



The EEG has been useful for the design and implementation of the Fish Habitat Compensation Plan – a *Fisheries Act* 35(2)(b) requirement – aimed at offsetting any serious harm to fish and fish habitat, and during the preparation of the project's environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA).

In designing the Fish Habitat Compensation Plan, Stornoway engaged and consulted with the Cree Nation to build on their traditional knowledge of the territory over a two-year period. This approach consisted of asking the users of the resource where and how the compensation should happen for their own benefit.

For two years, Stornoway collaborated with the Cree Nation of Mistissini and the Grand Council of the Crees, as well as with experts from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Environment Canada, to propose the best approach to palliate fish habitat losses and environmental mitigation measures for the project construction and operation. The Cree Nation participated in this process and proposed different possibilities for intervention, including improving existing spawning grounds and remediating a diversion canal at an abandoned copper mine site.

Results

From this close collaboration with the EEG, an optimal project was designed with a view to sustainable development. The finalized compensation plan to be implemented included a number of measures located at the Renard mine site area and the Cree Nation of Mistissini area with targeted measures in place for lake trout, brook trout, and walleye fish habitat. A monitoring program to measure the project's medium- and long-term effects on fish habitat and the effectiveness of the compensation plan was also established by Stornoway in collaboration with the Cree Nation of Mistissini and the Grand Council of the Crees.

Lessons Learned

Aboriginal communities in Canada have different expectations related to mine project development. Consequently, mineral industry proponents can greatly benefit from having an early dialogue with affected communities. Furthermore, incorporating Aboriginal traditional knowledge in project planning can also result in beneficial outcomes for both parties. In that regard, the federal environmental assessment and regulatory processes can serve as a starting point for communication and dialogue between mine proponents and Aboriginal communities.

The elaboration process of the Fish Habitat Compensation Plan used for the Renard diamond mine project is a great example of community engagement to build mutually beneficial outcomes. In this case, the proponent's early communication and engagement with the community as part of the environmental assessment and regulatory processes contributed to a positive outcome for Stornoway, which obtained the social licence to operate its \$752 million project.

For more information:

Visit Stornoway Diamond Corporation's web site and click on the environmental and social matters section (stornowaydiamonds.com/renard/esia/) or visit the Mistissini Web site (mistissini.ca/en/home.html) and the Grand Council of the Crees Web site (gcc.ca/gcc/gccnav.php).