

Ontario-Muskrat Solidarity Coalition

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Open Letter to International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD/CIGB): Urgent Need for a Mandatory Session on the Human and Ecological Impacts of Large Hydro Dams at Your June, 2019 Ottawa Conference

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Dear Mssrs. Rogers, De Vivo, Abebe, Zenz, Lino, Tournier, Zhou, and Noorzad,

We represent communities across the globe who are concerned about the lack of a human and ecological rights perspective at your annual meeting in Ottawa June 9-14, 2019. At a time when Indigenous and non-Indigenous land and water defenders here and around the globe are struggling with the negative impacts of large dams, we see that the big and bold promises made by your organization do not match the sordid reality on the ground.

Hence, we are writing to request a mandatory session with your delegates that would cover issues related to:

- Indigenous rights under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (in particular, the core principle of free, prior and informed consent);
- loss of biodiversity due to dam construction and operation;
- destruction of forests and loss of carbon sequestration capacity due to dam construction;
- loss of free flowing wild rivers;
- loss of livelihoods and economic catastrophe in local communities caused by flooding of lands and dam construction and operation;
- contributions to the climate change crisis from megadam construction and operation;
- and the myth that large and megadam hydroprojects are “clean and green” and deserving of taxpayer and ratepayer subsidies as a renewable energy source.

In this session your members will hear directly from the voices of those communities that have been destroyed by megadam projects.

While your invitation to delegates praises such megaprojects as Site C and Muskrat Falls, it does not appear that any of your program addresses life and death issues for humanity and the planet related to those projects, from the failure to seek and obtain free, prior and informed consent of

all Indigenous peoples affected to the scientifically-supported data on the devastating impact these megadams will have on the intricate webs of life that have coexisted since time immemorial. Indeed, water and all it provides is seen by your members as a resource to be exploited instead of as the sacred basis for life, a precious and vital part of the ecological web that has sustained us from the beginning of time but which continues to become ever more polluted and degraded.

Behind the lovely window dressing of your gathering are compelling and urgent issues that we feel can be addressed in dialogue and the spirit of open inquiry. Whether it is the concern of methylmercury poisoning of the traditional country food web at Muskrat Falls (combined with the well-justified fears of a catastrophic dam break given a history of sloppy work combined with the unproven reliance on quick clay to hold back a reservoir) or the incredible loss of biodiversity at Site C, there are significant but unaddressed issues that we feel must be shared with all of your members. We need to discuss the dire ecological fallout from the Tampur dam in Sumatra and the dangers it poses to the planet's last wild rhinos, elephants and orangutans.¹ Your members also need to know that Manitoba Hydro, for example, which works around the globe to promote megaprojects, has left a legacy of devastated northern Indigenous communities who have been subjected to drastic life changes and a trail of broken promises in the wake of large dams whose proponents never sought nor received Indigenous consent. The dam building boom in Asia has similarly destroyed and continues to destroy tribal and Indigenous cultures and the ecosystems upon which they have relied for millennia.

The idea that big is better has caused untold devastation around the planet: communities uprooted, displaced and interrupted, sacred places flooded, traditional Indigenous ways of life destroyed, fragile ecosystems wiped out, and ever increasing amounts of hydro-based methane contributing to climate disruption.

We trust that you will understand the importance of bringing the voices of those most negatively impacted by the work of your members to the forefront of the conference. As the UN increasingly warns that time is running out for our survival as a species, this is a golden opportunity for your members to listen to those whose knowledge of how the natural world works has for far too long been ignored. We also cannot proceed as a species believing our own press releases, and your promotion of large dams as clean, green, renewable and sustainable is simply not matched by the factual record or the science.

We seek this emergency meeting in the same loving and urgent spirit as the calls for justice being echoed around the globe by Indigenous and non-Indigenous land and water defenders, as well as by young people demanding the right to a future.

We hope to hear from you as soon as possible so that we may arrange to have appropriate speakers in place for this proposed session.

In hope for a better future,

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Grand Riverkeeper Labrador Inc., <http://www.grandriverkeeperlabrador.ca/>
North American Megadams Resistance Alliance (NAMRA) www.northeastmegadamresistance.org

¹ Sustainable Ecosystem Foundation (YEL) spatial analysis covered in report by Mongabay 10/23/18.