



May 19, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada  
K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing regarding the Site C hydroelectric dam project on the Peace River in northern British Columbia. A group of Canadian scholars, including several members of the Royal Society of Canada, have raised serious concerns regarding the process used for approval (see [www.sitecstatement.org](http://www.sitecstatement.org)). As President of the Royal Society, I am in agreement with the key issues they raise.

Although the Site C Project has received provincial and federal regulatory approval (including some of the necessary permits), the Royal Society of Canada is deeply concerned about how that approval was achieved. Indeed, project approval goes against the Canadian government emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and how it must shape and inform government action. The three-person Joint Review Panel, established by the two levels of government, appears to have been streamlined in order to expedite review of the Site C project; it had to work under a short time frame with limited resources and powers, and was consequently challenged in providing a thorough and comprehensive review of the project. Even then, the Joint Review Panel identified a number of environmental issues that beg further consideration under the federal Environmental Assessment Act and Clean Energy Act.

It is also curious why a project of this scope and nature was not assessed by the British Columbia Utilities Commission. That should have been a priority. Why did the BC legislature pass an act to prevent this essential review? This failure to subject the project to rigorous scrutiny raises serious questions about whether the project should proceed until such time as a more thorough review is undertaken.

Equally troubling is the fact that the Site C Project is proceeding even though there are outstanding First Nations treaty and Aboriginal rights to be resolved. Past projects often neglected or ignored Aboriginal peoples and their concerns—with adverse and lingering consequences. Those days are supposed to be over. Both the federal and British Columbian governments have made a public and solemn commitment not only to consult Aboriginal peoples in a meaningful and substantive way, but also recognize and address their fundamental rights and interests.

Why, then, were these rights and interests apparently not considered during the Joint Panel Review, and if they were, where is that part of the report? And why is construction underway when these matters are still to be addressed by the courts in two First Nations cases? That in itself would seem to be an infringement of Aboriginal interests. It also undermines all the goodwill over the past few years towards accommodation and reconciliation. That is not the blueprint for Canada in the twenty-first century, especially given Canada's recent decision to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Work on the Site C project should be discontinued for this reason alone.

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I realize that the Site C Project has received federal cabinet approval through an order-in-council. But that does not mean that the Canadian and British Columbian governments cannot step back from the project: first, to ensure a comprehensive regulatory review and assessment process; and secondly, to address First Nations treaty and Aboriginal rights as required by recent court decisions.

As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently told Indigenous youth at Oskayak High School in Saskatoon in late April, “we have to be responsible around the environment, we have to respect concerns that communities have and we have to build partnerships with indigenous people.” (Saskatoon Star Phoenix, 28 April 2016, p. A7). The Site C Project must be held to these standards.

Yours sincerely,



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President of the Royal Society of Canada