

MEDIA STATEMENT

SIO SILICA AND THE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION REPORT: REACTION from CONCERNED CITIZENS

WINNIPEG: Friday, June 23, 2023

FROM: The Manitoba Eco-Network (MBEN) and Our Line in the Sand (OLS) are non-profit organizations that presented at the CEC on behalf of concerned citizens; represented by the Public Interest Law Centre (Legal Aid Manitoba).

“We applaud the public release of the Clean Environment Commission report and thank the commissioners for listening to the expert evidence and serious concerns raised by citizens who are trying to protect the critically important watershed in eastern Manitoba.

The CEC report makes it clear that:

- Sio Silica has not done its due diligence.
- The Manitoba government should have required much more detailed information from Sio Silica.
- A project of this magnitude requires a cumulative effects assessment for the full 24-year life of the project (rather than focus on a 5-yr license), which the department did not ask Sio Silica to provide.

In the CEC’s own words: "After this lengthy review, members of the panel are unable to state with confidence that all potential environmental effects of this project have been fully considered and that adequate detailed plans have been prepared for preventing or mitigating these effects.”

The CEC report conclusively demonstrates that the Sio Silica project should never have passed the initial Department of Environment and Climate screen. There are too many fundamentally important questions that have never been asked or answered by the proponent and the Department of the Environment and Climate.

It is time to put a stop to this shoddy, piece-meal approach to evaluating such a large and risky project that will impact thousands of people for decades to come.

This flawed process has created needless anxiety and even fear in Manitobans who cherish their rural communities and have been good stewards of the lands and waters.

We are urging the Manitoba government and Minister of Environment and Climate Kevin Klein to:

1. Reject the Sio Silica licensing proposal on the grounds that it has not demonstrated that the potential environmental effects of the project have been fully considered or addressed.
2. Indicate to the Department of Environment and Climate and Sio Silica that a new licence application will **not be** considered until all eight recommendations of the CEC have been fully complied with.

We wish to thank community members, their many volunteers, the independent experts and the CEC staff and panel who have conclusively shown the value of independent, evidence-based analysis.”

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS:

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Our Line in the Sand is a group of concerned citizens advocating to protect the Watershed in eastern Manitoba. Many members of OLS rely on the aquifers that will be affected by this project for drinking water in their homes.

Manitoba Eco-Network is a public interest, charitable environmental organization seeking to promote and facilitate good environmental governance and the protection of Manitoba’s environment for the benefit of current and future generations.

<https://mbeconetwork.org/>

Matrix Solutions Inc: matrix-solutions.com

BACKGROUND:

Sio Silica wants to extract silica sand in a mining operation near Vivian, Manitoba, drilling as many as 10,000 extraction wells in the area over the next 24 years.

OLS and MBEN hired independent experts Matrix Solutions to evaluate Sio's proposal. Louis-Charles Boutin, principal groundwater engineer at Matrix with 20 years of experience in the hydrogeology consulting industry, presented serious concerns to the CEC.

He identified two critical irreversible effects the project has on the hydrogeological system that could lead to indirect effects in the long-term. First is degradation of the Winnipeg Shale Aquitard; and, second is an increase in fracture density of the Red River Carbonate Aquifer. Both effects increase the vulnerability of the groundwater system.

Under the topsoil in southeastern Manitoba, there is a limestone aquifer and a sandstone aquifer that are separated by a protective layer of shale (called the Winnipeg Shale Aquitard).

If Sio Silica is permitted to drill thousands of wells through the limestone and through the shale to remove sand, many large caverns will open up underground. The protective shale layer is expected to collapse into these caverns around each well. When the two aquifers are no longer separated, the pristine groundwater in southeastern Manitoba will be put at risk.

Of further concern, Sio Silica plans to use an extraction technique that has never been tried before as a full-scale mining method.