



MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

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Cc: Public Registry - publicregistry@gov.mb.ca

Re: Comments on TANCO EAP - Tailings Reprocessing Facility Project

In this letter, the Manitoba Eco-Network provides comments on TANCO's proposed Tailings Reprocessing Facility Project. We have previously engaged on related developments, including an appeal of the approval of TANCO's Bernic Lake Mine Tailings Management Area Dam Raise and Control Structure Upgrade. We continue to have serious concerns about TANCO's operations in this area, and this proposal compounds our concerns with the operations. It appears to be a case of license creep, where proponents incrementally modify design and operational characteristics of a development in order to skirt more comprehensive public scrutiny.

Due to the timing of the consultation period, which fell during the December holiday season, we were not able to undertake a comprehensive review of this specific Environment Act Proposal (EAP). In order to facilitate meaningful public engagement, we **strongly recommend** consultation opportunities not be held during holiday breaks and other common times when offices are closed, and many are off work.

Given the potential negative impacts associated with this constantly changing operation, we recommend:

- The Department of Environment and Climate Change require additional information from TANCO, subject to a review by TAC and a second public comment period.
- The Minister require TANCO's operations (not only this application, but also the recently approved modifications) undergo an evidence-based review by the Clean Environment Commission with a public hearing and associated participant funding program.
- In preparation for such a review, the Department should ensure all associated licences, including Licence No. 973, include requirements for the construction and operation of the tailings ponds as well as requirements for the monitoring of potential environmental impacts.

Missing Information: Tailings Ponds and Water Management

This specific application appears to involve the construction of a bigger mill for operations, not only for reprocessing the tailings, but also to increase the overall mine capacity. We note the tailings volume produced annually will increase by 6 times. This is obviously why the expansion of the existing tailings pond, which was granted last fall, was necessary. In our minds, the two applications are inextricably linked. Our concerns about TANCO's operations identified in the fall have not been adequately addressed, and indeed may be compounded in this application.

Specifically, TANCO still does not appear to have conducted a stability analysis, which should have informed the alteration design proposal for the tailings pond. The properties of the foundation material continue to appear to be unknown.

We are concerned that the corporation continues to operate and expand a tailings storage facility that is not properly contained (i.e., eliminating transport of various chemicals to the surrounding environment). This is particularly concerning when considering the by-product produced by reprocessing the tailings. This by-product material will likely be more concentrated, meaning that chemicals of concern that may leach into the surrounding environment will be present in higher concentrations in the final tailings. Thus, tailings should only be placed in a fully contained storage facility.

We have outstanding questions about the water balance required for operations (see section 3.2.5). We have concerns about the use of non-standard terminology in identifying water management practices (e.g., VOID, "make-up water"). Although the fresh water added to the processes initially appears to be quite small, it appears that overall, the operation requires 30 cubic metres per hour of non-process water. Significantly more information is needed to fully comment on water requirements for the new facility.

Underground ore will be stockpiled during the warmer months before being processed in the plant during the winter. Runoff will be collected in a ditch which will flow to the WTMA (west tailings area). It appears that it will just be stockpiled on a gravel pad (called Run of Mill pad) so a proper liner/containment system below the stockpiled ore must be put in place to ensure that rain infiltrating the pile is properly managed and sent to WTMA. Similarly, proper containment systems will be required beneath the fuel and propane storage areas (this was not described in the corresponding sections).

More information about TANCO's existing and future plans to monitor the surrounding groundwater and Bernic Lake would also be helpful. This should be detailed and include requirements for how much effluent the company is permitted by government to discharge in the lake, the protocols in place to ensure compliance with these targets, and publicly related details about key pollutants, including phosphorus.

Finally, we are concerned about the introduction of a new septic field for the increase in sanitary waste at the site. Can the Department please clarify if this is permissible under current regulatory requirements?

Overall, it is not apparent that TANCO has provided sufficient information to support the approval of their proposed Reprocessing Facility. We continue to have serious concerns with TANCO's operations in this area and recommend more data be collected about ongoing and proposed activities, and publicly reviewed, before any approvals are granted.

Conclusion

Under *The Environment Act*, the Department of Environment and Climate Change is tasked with protecting the quality of the environment and environmental health of present and future generations and providing the opportunity for all citizens to exercise influence over the quality of their living environment. We are confident that these principles will be reflected in the assessment and licensing decision for TANCO's proposed expansion and future proposed mining developments.

Recognizing the growing demand for critical minerals and expanded mining operations, including those proposed in TANCO's EAP, there is an urgent need for modernized and comprehensive laws and policies. With the Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources tasked with the development of "a real critical minerals strategy that creates good jobs and economic growth in northern Manitoba with Indigenous inclusion", change appears to be on the horizon.

Until we have more comprehensive laws and policies, it is unclear how the mining projects currently being assessed and approved will be able to meet the objectives and requirements to be set out in this forthcoming strategy. There should be a pause on the approval of new developments or proposed expansions until we have updated laws and regulations that require a higher standard of environmental protection and sustainability.

Sincerely,

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