

MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

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AN IMPORTANT VICTORY FOR SAFE DRINKING WATER, SCIENCE AND COMMON SENSE

MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK AND OUR LINE IN THE SAND (MbEN and OLS) COMMEND THE DECISION NOT TO APPROVE LICENCE FOR THE VIVIAN SILICA SAND EXTRACTION PROJECT

WINNIPEG: Friday, February 16, 2024

Today's decision by the Government of Manitoba to reject the proposed *Environment Act* license for Sio Silica's Vivian Silica Sand Extraction Project is an important victory for safe drinking water, for science and for common sense.

"We commend Manitoba for listening to the community and to the scientific evidence" said Tangi Bell of Our Line in the Sand. "This project raised too many risks for Manitoba's precious aquifers."

MbEN and OLS have raised concerns about this project since it was first announced. They highlighted the project's risks in last year's Clean Environment Commission (CEC) hearing. As the CEC report made clear, there were too many unanswered questions to approve Sio Silica's proposal.

"This project never made sense for the region or for Manitoba" said Glen Koroluk, Manitoba Eco-Network Executive Director. "Today's announcement confirms the importance of evidence-based decision-making."

While MbEN and OLS celebrate today's announcement, they note the many years of stress and frustration experienced by community members as they fought to understand the impacts of the proposed project. Contributing to massive information gaps was the fact the proposal included only a 5-year snapshot of a 24-year project. The proposal also failed to include a cumulative effects assessment considering the project's likely impacts in combination with the effects of other past or future activities.

"This decision illustrates the need to improve Manitoba's environmental assessment process to enable better environmental decision-making" said Bell. "There needs to be

more opportunities for meaningful public engagement and supports for citizens seeking to protect their homes and livelihoods.”

MBEN and OLS wish to thank our community members, the many volunteers, the legal team and independent experts as well as the CEC for their time and dedication to environmental protection in Manitoba.

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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 environmental charitable 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/>

MBEN and OLS were represented by the Public Interest Law Centre of Legal Aid Manitoba.

BACKGROUND:

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

The novel extraction method was shown in the CEC hearing to create large cavities underground, destroying an important barrier between two separate aquifers and potentially creating of sinkholes at the surface. The direct effects of the project would have significantly increased the risk of contaminants entering the groundwater in the future.

The CEC’s report released in June 2023 found that the project proposal contained significant uncertainty about the project’s risks, and identified ten impact monitoring and mitigation plans that the proponent had failed to complete.

The uncertainty was compounded by the Proponent’s “project splitting”, by which they sought approval for the sand processing plant in a separate application from the extraction project, and limited review of the extraction project to only the first five years

of activities. Key risk assessments, including a cumulative effects assessment, were not completed.

In response to the CEC report, Manitoba announced an additional technical review of the project proposal. No information about this review was made available to the public.