

EXHIBIT NUMBER: Sub-503
File Name: Lake Winnipeg
Regulation
Date: Feb. 28, 2015
Received by: [Signature]
(Commission Secretary)

SIXTY YEARS FROM NOW
Alison Burnett Benningen

Written Submission About Lake Winnipeg Regulation
To The Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
February 28, 2015

Where will we be sixty years from now? I could go back to sixty years ago where my earliest memories lie. They are on the sandy shores of Lake Winnipeg at Victoria Beach where I played as a child. Or I could go back to more recent history, 1972, when the first female councillor from the Rural Municipality of Victoria Beach addressed a public forum in the old Auditorium. Doreen Benningen addressed Hydro that day; I was young enough to be embarrassed with having my parent on the stage. Mum said to Cass Begg, Manitoba Hydro's representative, "that if the lake is regulated it will ruin the beaches." The public was successful that day in stopping regulation. Four years later that changed.

Lake Winnipeg's water levels have been regulated for hydro-electric production since 1976. I say no to a permanent license and yes to an interim license with conditions. Briefly, in this written submission to The Manitoba Clean Environment Commission, I am addressing two issues of regulation, water level of Lake Winnipeg and water quality.

We know now that Councillor Benningen was correct in predicting that regulation would ruin the beaches. In addition we know that water regulation also ruins the marshes because the water never gets low enough for the marches to replenish. Oak Hammock Marsh aptly demonstrates this in their marsh cells.

An argument for regulating water levels for hydro-electric production has been financial. We can sell power south and reduce costs for Manitobans. Let us go back in history and look at major decisions based on the promise of financial gain. Winnipeg was going to be the Chicago of the North. Opposite the Legislative Building is a wide avenue, Memorial Boulevard, which was to be lined with stately buildings. In the rural area land was drained, trees cut down, to create fields of golden grain.

What happened to the financial gain? Business went south with the building of the Panama Canal. The dirty thirties arrived with a wind that blew away the topsoil no longer held by moisture and roots. A financial gain argument does not 'hold water' for me.

The second issue is water quality. Beaches have become smelly and water toxic with algae blooms in the summer. Marshes are the kidneys, cleaning the water before it enters the lake. They are under threat. No one gains from this.

I say no to a permanent license to Hydro to regulate Lake Winnipeg. I think the interim licence with conditions affords the opportunity for a place for everyone at the table. What is needed is a collaborative effort, people of the water shed, foundations, property owners, three levels of government to resolve these complex issues of water level and water quality of Lake Winnipeg.

So that sixty years from now, a child has the possibility of creating first memories along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, our cherished heritage.

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