

Presentation to the Clean Environment Commission

Niverville, Manitoba

October 26, 2012

By: Karen Friesen

Good morning, Mr. Chair and Panel Members,

I'd like to welcome you all to Niverville and to thank you for this opportunity to finally speak this morning. My name is Karen Friesen. I stand here today, October 26, to voice my concerns about Bipole III in my own community, the community where my husband was born and raised on the family farm, and where together today we are raising our family on this now 4th generation farm. I am finding it rather ironic because it was exactly two years ago to the day yesterday, when I stood in our Legislative Buildings on Broadway before a meeting of the Committee on Crown Corporations, along with over a hundred other upset landowners. That was the day that I was first refused the opportunity to voice the concerns over Bipole III of hundreds of landowners from across Manitoba's most productive farm belt. That was the day that I first became aware that there were so many others, including engineers, retired Hydro executives, even one CEO, and so many others from across our province that also had serious concerns about the Bipole III project.

As you will likely know, I have spent the better part of the past two years working with many others trying to make sense of how a project so important to all Manitobans can be a project that has become one where decisions are being driven by policy and by politics and not by best practices. I have had the privilege of working with some of the finest people in this province from all walks of life, trying to ensure decisions are being made for the right reasons and that mistakes will not be made today that we will all be forced to pay for tomorrow. There is no doubt that the Bipole III project is a complicated project. It is impossible for the general public, myself included, to understand all aspects of the project. I cannot begin to count the times I have been asked by people in this province, including those who may have the most at stake, the producers of our food, who contribute in such a huge way to the food security and economic well-being of our province, "What is the REAL reason that the Bipole III route was changed to traverse the far west side of Manitoba through our best farmland at such extra cost and with so many

more negative effects? “ I have searched for the answer for over two years. There has been a lot of smoke and a lot of mirrors advanced by the parties involved, trying to answer the question. Unfortunately, I have yet to hear any good answer. The truth in my mind is that there is none.

Today, I stand here as Karen Friesen, a farmer and a landowner whose family and whose farm will be directly impacted by the Bipole III transmission line. I want to focus on just a very few of the concerns that we have with the project as its line traverses our land and our communities. It is my opinion that these concerns continue to get lost in a complicated debate and that they are still not being properly addressed.

According to provincial calculations, economic activity generated by farmers, along with the food-and-beverage-processing and food-service industries, generated \$10.1 billion in economic activity in 2010 and created over 62,000 jobs for Manitobans. Keystone Agricultural Producers research shows for every dollar a grain farmer earns, \$13.90 is set into circulation in our economy.

Of the 20 million acres farmed in Manitoba, only 25% is classified as Land Inventory Classes 1, 2, and 3 - our best soils. Every Class 1 acre is located in the southern portion of the province. Productive land across the province continues to be lost to non-agricultural uses, putting even more pressure on the remaining arable land. As Manitoba Hydro went through the process of choosing a route for Bipole III through these most productive soils, they set up a matrix to help them decide the best option for routing Bipole III. What completely astounds me is that, when Hydro was considering the 23 criteria they chose for their route selection matrix, agriculture was ranked equally among the other 22 criteria, which included amphibians and reptiles. Six of the criteria including birds, mammals, caribou and culture and heritage were even given the opportunity for extra weight. Agriculture, on the other hand, remained ranked equally with garter snakes, even in this predominantly agricultural zone. Unbelievable

considering what it contributes to our province and its economy.

To make matters worse, while the decisions on routing were being made by Manitoba Hydro, the landowner stakeholders did not even know they were being made.

I would like now to touch on a few of our concerns that I know are also shared by many other landowners. On our farm, one of our serious concerns will be the severe production constraints we will be forced to work with for the rest of time once the line is built. There will ongoing problems associated with placement of towers in the field. In any single season, farmers may be in a field a minimum of 10 times pulling different implements with high horsepower tractors. Working around or near the towers and line will pose problems to many landowners and these problems have not been properly analyzed by Manitoba Hydro.

One of the production constraints we will deal with is the time and financial cost of manoeuvring large equipment around towers located in the field. Overlap and underlap of pesticides and fertilizers around towers will be a continuing problem. We row crop our entire farm and so special season-long problems of inconvenience and cost with row cropping around towers will be a serious issue for us. The spreading of noxious weeds from areas beneath and around towers and rights-of-way will give us higher costs on an annual basis from both increased use of pesticides, fertilizer and fuel and increased labour costs.

A large portion of the route for Bipole III in the southern section of the province will traverse the most heavily populated hog, poultry and dairy belt in Manitoba. The land we farm, as well as almost every other acre in the R.M. of Hanover, is dedicated to manure management plans that are demanded by Manitoba Conservation of every single hog operation and many dairy and poultry operations. The plans dictate very strict rules that must be adhered to by every producer with regards to manure application. These rules are strictly enforced for good reason so that we are all operating in environmentally responsible ways. The majority of these operations work with liquid manure injection and spreading

equipment utilizing drag hoses to apply the manure. This type of specialized equipment is incompatible with large obstructions such as huge towers in the field. It is functionally incompatible and it will present a safety hazard to the equipment and the operator not to mention a risk to power security. Every year on our farm, we are subject to random audits by staff from Manitoba Conservation who come and sample application rates and soils to ensure we have not over-applied manure. Having towers in fields that are allocated to the manure management plans will pose risks of severe environmental fines to the farm owner due to overlap and uneven application as a result of these in field obstructions. Manitoba Hydro has already admitted that it has not taken any of these serious issues/consequences into account when they were planning the route. It has become clear that they do not appreciate the density of hog operations in the area and the amount of land that will be covered with hog manure application on an annual basis. This is just one example of what today's farming practices involve. Most farmers today strive through management practices to be good stewards of the land and to work so that our environment remains protected for future generations.

Another serious concern for us is the operational complications of aerial spraying. The area that we farm uses aerial application every single year. It is an area of the province that grows many special crops such as corn, beans, and canola. The soils are very productive and allow us to produce excellent crops. On many of the crops that we grow, like canola and winter wheat, for example, the use of late-season fungicides applied by aircraft because the crop is too advanced to apply by ground-based equipment, is common practice every year. If we get wet years, as we often do and as was the case in the spring of 2011, air application of herbicides and pesticides may be our only option. If the application of pesticides is not an option, the losses will be catastrophic to the landowner. Manitoba Hydro has completely underestimated the impact of this serious constraint. They have also failed to take into account that the effects of this particular production constraint have a far wider reach than simply the field that the line will traverse. There will be situations that adjacent fields will also be impacted and yet will not be

considered for compensation. On top of these obvious problems, when aerial applicators have more work than they can handle at busy times, it is not surprising that they choose not to service fields with a power line traversing them. The safety risks and application constraints are too great. Who can blame them? Yet we all know that, in the case of Bipole III, it will be the landowners who will suffer the resulting losses.

There will be a wide number of problems associated with placement of towers in a field, depending on where they end up. Of utmost concern to me will be the safety and liability issues that will arise from working around such structures in the field. As I noted earlier, it is common practice to be in any single field numerous times in a season. Today's farmers are working with huge tractors, many over 500 HP and pulling very wide implements, such as our 110-foot harrow and 120-foot sprayer. We are working with GPS and auto-steer technology. We are also often working 24-hour days and farming large acreages. We are striving to maximize productivity as well as striving to be responsible partners with our environment. It is the simple nature of farming today. It is the reality and it is also exciting for our children, including our own son who will be one of the farmers of tomorrow. What I am witnessing happening, with so little thought and understanding of agriculture and the routing of this transmission line through the most productive farm belt in Manitoba, is wrong. In fact, it is a disgrace. I have heard Manitoba Hydro explain in recent days that they cannot route the line along road allowances as they cannot risk road traffic hitting one of the towers and taking it down. If this route proceeds as planned, it is only a matter of time before the inevitable happens. If a tractor or an implement it is pulling hits, or just even hooks a tower, you will see it buckle in seconds. The risk is so much higher for a tower placed in a field where farm implements will be forced to work constantly around it than along a road allowance. It is hard for me to believe that this topic has been avoided in discussions. To make matters even more critical, we will have to worry not only about the safety of our operators which includes our young family members as they learn to farm, but about the liability and insurance issues that we will

now have to deal with once the tower is damaged or worse yet brought down. When you traverse over 350 km of prime cultivated farmland, it is guaranteed to happen; it's only a matter of when and to whom. It is impossible to compensate for the increased risks and liability.

Hydro says they will place towers 42 metres into the field. They say "this will allow for farmers to work around the tower." In reality, this will leave little leeway for today's wide equipment to work around and does not take into account tomorrow's technology changes. One thing we know for sure is that farming history teaches us that everything gets bigger. We are always trying to cover more acres in less time. Having an obstruction in the field means we farm around an obstruction. Constraints are forever and, with changes in technology, will only get worse. It is safer and easier to "farm by" an obstruction, in other words, along a road allowance, ditch, or field boundary than to constantly have to farm around it.

You will also know that it is my opinion that the route for Bipole III should have been left where Manitoba Hydro had spent decades planning for it, and where it would have affected next to zero agricultural land.

The last concern I will touch briefly on today is the lack of concrete, long-term evidence that will guarantee there will not be, or that there will never be, any health concerns to those of us and our families or to our livestock who will be forced to live alongside the line and at times pass back and forth under hundreds of times in any single season. It is one thing for those who are forcing the line upon us, to state there are no "known" long-term health concerns or no "direct" links today, but it is a completely different thing to be able to guarantee that these concerns will never exist. History has proven that this can change over time once more studies have been completed. No one is willing to put into writing that there will never be anything of concern. It is also one thing to choose to make a decision for yourself and family with any of life's risks. It is completely another for something to be forced upon you over which you have absolutely no control. There is no denying there has been and will continue to be a large

stress factor to all of us that will be the most directly affected because we are forced to live and work alongside Bipole III. There will always be safety concerns which can and will impact long-term health and well-being. No amount of compensation will ever change that.

Manitoba Hydro has admitted that many of these issues cannot be properly mitigated so their only means of dealing with these very serious direct impacts are through what they call fair compensation. They have failed to fully understand that it will be impossible to compensate fairly for many of these issues and that it will certainly be impossible to do so with a one-time compensation package. I have heard them state more than once that they have chosen a one-time compensation package in order to simplify things for Hydro. They have stated that the one-time compensation payment requires less administration and provides an upfront capitalized payment for the loss of future value from the land. I have also heard a Hydro employee say, and I quote from an article in the Western Producer, "We want to make this fair, if not more than fair, so we can facilitate the project when we get approval. It would take an awful long time to battle with 500 plus landowners if your compensation package isn't adequate." Well, I would like to emphatically state here today that if the only answer Hydro is able to provide as to how to handle the landowners who they admit will be so negatively impacted by the project, is compensation, then they will have a fight on their hands from many of us and they will have to go back to the drawing board rather than try to convince us that a one-time payment of any amount could ever be fair. That is why past Hydro projects offer annual compensation packages and so many other provincial utility companies do the same.

It is also why the Association of Manitoba Municipalities at their last two annual meetings have approved resolutions with 90% membership support, asking the Government of Manitoba to reconsider the routing for Bipole III. Again, a disgrace when these requests so heavily supported from across the entire province, are ignored. When there is also concern from so many other groups including the Keystone Agricultural Producers, it continues to compel me to fight for the future of our farms that will

be so directly impacted by the Bipole III project. In the final days of the process, as Manitoba Hydro goes through the motions and gets closer to receiving their licence to commence construction of the line and to change the landscape across Manitoba's best farming region as well as our farms forever, I ask you, Panel members of the Clean Environment Commission, to please take a close look at what is about to happen here. This is our last chance for the future of our farms, the future of our families and the future of our province to stop one of the most monumental mistakes ever made in our province.

I'd like to close with one final request. Over the past 2 years I have both participated in and watched the Bipole III debate unfold & now here we are, in the final stretch of what I consider to have been a flawed process that seems to be leading to an inevitable decision. I would like to ask both the proponent Manitoba Hydro and the Commission Panel to remember that at the end of the day, you have both been paid to do a job. Your decisions and recommendations on the Bipole III Project will be made and you can all move on to your next order of business. However, for every individual who has appeared before the Commission to voice their concerns, there are hundreds and thousands of others who have not. We have not been paid to do a job and we cannot simply move on to the next order of business in our lives and on our farms. I ask the Commission Panel, to please remember when considering their recommendations to the Minister, that this is a decision we will be forced to live with for the next hundred years and one that once it is made, can never be taken back. Thank you for your time.