

Robert Bechtel and Brenda Parlee

Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology

## Introduction

On May 27, 2010 a Joint Review Panel was formed to begin an assessment of the Northern Gateway Pipeline Project which would involve the construction of pipelines, approximately 1172 km in length, from Bruderheim, Alberta to Kitamat, British Columbia, and would pass through a wide variety First Nation and Métis lands and numerous ecological niches.



Over a period of three years the committee:

- read **9,000 letters of comment**;
- heard oral evidence from **393 participants**;
- collected oral statements from **1,179 individuals**;
- listened to **206 intervenors**;
- and read **56 written final arguments**.

In June, 2014, the Joint Review Panel recommended that the federal government approve the project. In June, 2016, the Federal Court of Appeal overturned the approval after finding Ottawa failed to properly consult the First Nations affected by the pipeline.



However, if review panels do not understand or are unable to bridge the significant knowledge gap between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, then how are Indigenous people to see the consultations as anything other than mere tokenism?

*"We were not persuaded that construction and routine operations of the project would have a negative effect on the social fabric of communities in the project area."*

- National Energy Board, (2013). *Consultation: Report of the Joint Review Panel for the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project*, p. 23

## Purpose

This research uses a critical realist approach to analyze transcripts of the oral statements provided by community members who spoke at the public hearings to see how their perspectives were presented as knowledge claims.

The analysis will reveal if the Joint Review Panel accurately understood and represented Indigenous ways of knowing. The results will inform policy makers on the importance of listening to and being an agent for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in their policy decisions.

## Findings

*"This proposed project endangers our promises to our grandchildren that we would look after our land, our culture, our people for them. We cannot break this promise to our grandchildren."*

*Chief John Ridsdale, Burns Lake*

*"You can see the waterways, they're not clean; there's plenty of rust... and we can see all the deformities in some of the moose and some of game and the fish."*

*Chief Leon Chalifoux, Edmonton*

*"You travel down furthermore, you come to a place called Giltoyees, Long linlet, and on the south mouth of the river -- of the inlet you'll see paintings, paintings of Indian paint telling who owns that area, who was there. And I'm one of the last ones that can read the signs and it makes me -- tears come out of my eyes."*

*Chief Sam Robinson, Kitamat*

*"You must understand who the Wet'suwet'en are in order to arrive at meaningful consultation. The Wet'suwet'en do not just use the land; we do so in accordance with our traditions, our laws, our tenure system and governance forum, the potlatches."*

*David deWit, Burns Lake*

## Social Fabric

### What is the social fabric?



1. **Fairness** is experienced when individuals develop an allegiance to the community and society.
2. **Recognition** is the contribution that individuals and groups make to the society
3. **Trust** speaks to the sensation of not being taken advantage of and that institutional leaders and agents will pursue the interest of the community
4. **A sense of belonging** - feeling at home in their community

(Breton, Hartmann, Lennards, & Reed, 2004, pp. 14-15).