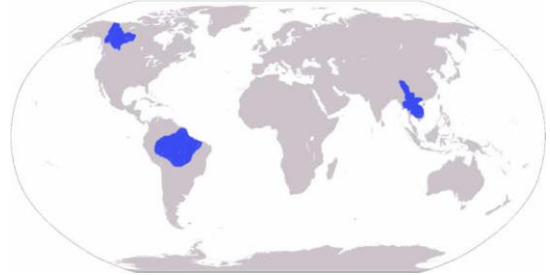


## Working in a “good way”

### 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Statement from Kevin Ahkimnachie, member of the Dene ‘Tha First Nation and Director of Livelihood of Treaty 8 of Alberta



I am a member of the Dene ‘Tha First Nation. My Territory is in the northwestern part of what is now called ‘Alberta’. My people have been witness to many changes to our lands over the past 150 years and are concerned about the impacts of deforestation and energy development on our relations, the caribou and to our own culture, language and connection to the land.

Over the past four years, we have been working to map our placenames, which tell the story of our lands, and protect the caribou who share the land with us, through a collaborative, international and community-led project called Tracking Change. Today I suggest that Tracking Change be considered as a ‘best practice’ or key example of work being done in ‘a good way’ for the Permanent Forum to consider in it’s recommendations.

Tracking Change is a six year initiative funded through the *Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* (2016-2021). Guided by a Traditional Knowledge Steering Committee (of elders, Chiefs and other leaders), it currently comprises a network of more than 60 Indigenous, Caboclos and ethnic Lao/Thai communities and partner organizations from the Mackenzie (in northwestern Canada), Tapajós (part of the Lower Amazon in Brazil) and the Lower Mekong (in Thailand) River Basins. The purpose of the project is to build capacity for Indigenous peoples and local fishing communities to document and share their own knowledge about changes in the sustainability of freshwater ecosystems and the associated impacts on local fishing livelihoods. Community-based projects have resulted in new insights about these river basins as well as methodological innovations for documenting and sharing local and traditional knowledge.

We offer the following contributions to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) which we believe establish our project as an example of work that is done ‘in a good way’ and a model for the UNPFII to consider as it implements its mandate.

#### **UNPFII Principles on Data Collection and Indicators**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/data-and-indicators.html>

We offer Tracking Change as a successful example of how Indigenous peoples can lead and/or participate as equal partners in ecological research and monitoring. Over the last four years, communities have conceptualized research objectives, developed culturally meaningful indicators, implemented research,

# trackingchange...

and carried out analysis and reporting of their own data. Although this is done at local scales, communities have also worked together to determine meanings at larger scales (i.e., watershed scale, global scales).

## **UNPFII Mandate on the Environment**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/environment.html>

We offer Tracking Change as a successful example of how Indigenous Knowledge systems can contribute to a better understanding of the complexity and significance of climate change for Indigenous peoples and their homelands. For example, community-based projects in the Mackenzie River Basin have revealed:

- decreased access to traditional fishing areas (due to lower water levels, melting permafrost, ice safety);
- changes in the abundance and distribution of valued fish species (e.g., new species observed, changes in migration patterns);
- changes in the ecology of lakes and streams.

In the Mackenzie-Amazon-Mekong basins, hydroelectric development projects have been constructed (and others planned and developed) without the consent of Indigenous peoples and fishing communities whose livelihoods depend on the sustainability of freshwater ecosystems. Mining activities follows the same path. We offer Tracking Change as a best practice of how research and monitoring led by Indigenous Knowledge can produce new insights about the impacts of large scale resource development on Indigenous livelihoods. Specifically,

- implications of forced resettlement and displacement (e.g., from hydroelectric development);
- social, economic, cultural and spiritual costs of land and resource disturbance and degradation (e.g., loss of fish species, degraded source drinking water);
- human health and nutritional costs of loss of access, availability and health of traditional country foods.

The network and its supporting partners (e.g., Government of the Northwest Territories, in Canada) may also be considered a useful example of how Indigenous voices (including voices of youth) can be heard at different levels of decision-making (e.g., regional –global). Documented Traditional knowledge has also been used in implementing a trans-jurisdictional water agreement between provinces-territories in Canada.

## **UNPFII Mandate – Children and Youth**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/children-and-youth.html>

In the Mackenzie-Mekong-Amazon and elsewhere, youth networks can contribute to building new knowledge and increased capacity to sustain their communities and the environment locally and globally. We offer Tracking Change as successful example of how to engage youth in learning and leadership. For example, Youth Knowledge Fairs have stimulated youth research and action in local communities across the Mackenzie River Basin; a group of Indigenous youth (Grade 10-11) from the network traveled to 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24) to have their voices heard. All projects in Canada involved youth (as knowledge holders and/or trainees) in the documentation and sharing of work in local Indigenous languages and cultural practices.

**Please join us and learn more about our project, and potentially share ideas for more global participation in initiatives like Tracking Change at our Side event on April 30th.**

**For more information on our project, visit [www.TrackingChange.ca](http://www.TrackingChange.ca)**