

# EABAMETOONG FIRST NATION



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## NUCLEAR WASTE DIALOGUE

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### REPORT

**SEPTEMBER 2004 TO JANUARY 2005**

*“This is an important issue and clearly it is not going to go away soon. The government has a responsibility to talk seriously and meaningfully with First Nations and First Nations have the same responsibilities in their responses. This is an issue that affects Canadians today and for generations to come. Wisdom and traditional knowledge, as well as science will resolve this.”*



**Chief Charlie O'Keese  
Eabametoong First Nation**

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## **PREAMBLE**

The overall goal of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) aboriginal dialogue process is to create the needed foundation for a long-term, positive and trusting relationship between the Nuclear Waste Management Organization and the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada including First Nation, Inuit, and Métis. Eabametoong First Nation shares the same views and desire and as such are proactive in this dialogue process.

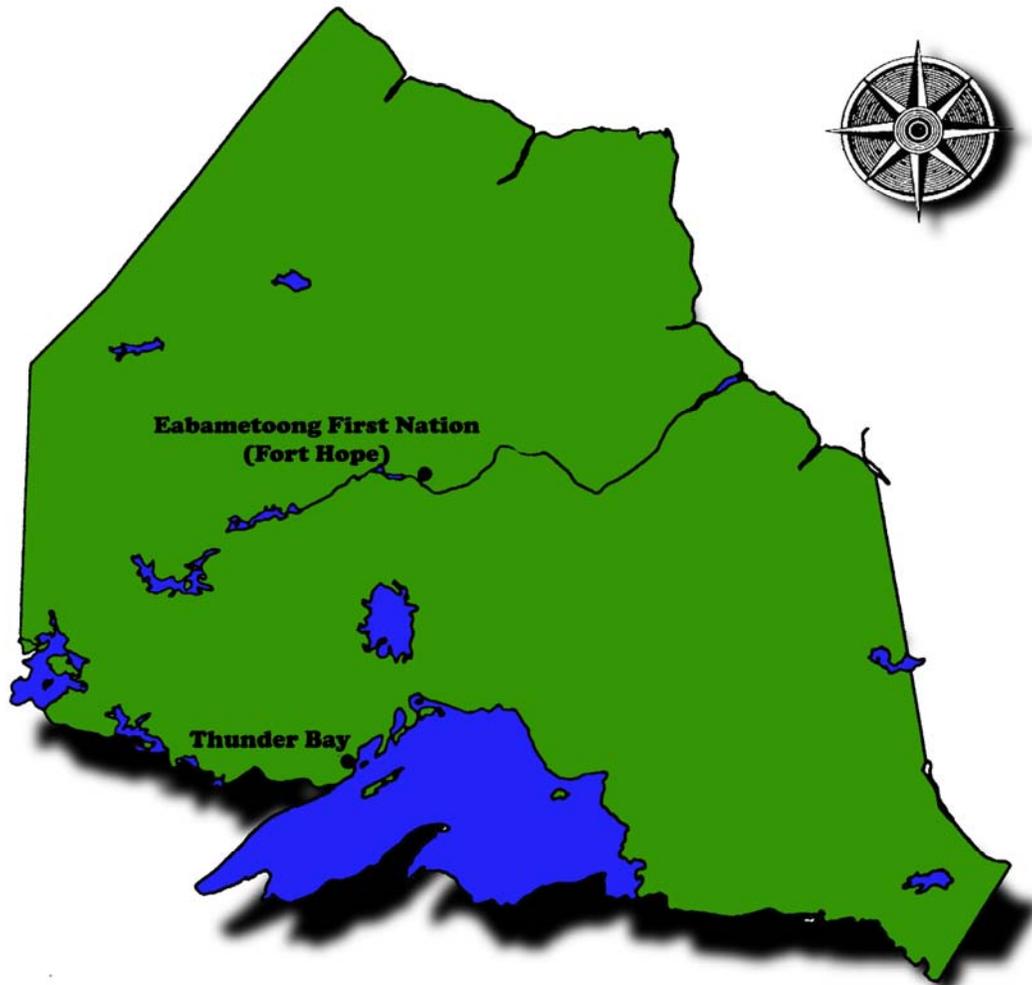
## **BACKGROUND**

In September 2004, Anthony Hodge from the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) met with Mike Rae, Matawa First Nations Management and explained to Mike the mission of the NWMO, and current initiatives/engagements with First Nation and Metis groups. During the course of the subsequent conversation, Mike Rae suggested to Tony, another key ingredient missing from the First Nation engagement model could be NWMO, directly communicating at the grassroots level with the First Nation communities. Ensuing discussions over the course of several weeks determined that an engagement option to explore would be for the NWMO to meet with and directly engage a First Nation community in order to grasp a better understanding as to the needs of communities, and the processes for internal consultation.

In December 2004, Anthony Hodge NWMO met with the Chief and Council of Eabametoong First Nation (Fort Hope). The discussions were extremely useful in providing a sense of how communities would want to be engaged. It was decided at this meeting, that dialogue would be initiated with the Elders of the community, as it was once done, in a traditional manner. The information accessed by the Elders would flow through to community level at general meetings and the responses would provide the basis for ongoing dialogue between NWMO and the community.

## EABAMETOONG FIRST NATION

Eabametoong First Nation is a remote First Nation Reserve situated on the Albany River, Ontario, north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel. Their on-reserve population is approximately 1200 people. The community still relies upon traditional hunting and gathering for 70% of its protein needs. It is in every sense of the word, a self-reliant community. The community is governed by a Chief and Council process with bi-annual elections. The foresight and courage displayed by the Chief and Council, in this, an election year should be commended. The Chief and Council should be acknowledged for allowing the Elders and the community to engage a contentious issue such as Nuclear Waste Management, which could be easily politically misconstrued. From the outset, Chief and Council have stated their wish to develop an engagement model that speaks to First Nation traditional values at the core, being, the engagement of the Elders as a precursor to community dialogue. At a time when so much emphasis is placed upon the role of Chief and Council, it is refreshing that all parties are willing to participate in an old, but rarely used, traditional method of community engagement, being through the Elders of Eabametoong First Nation.

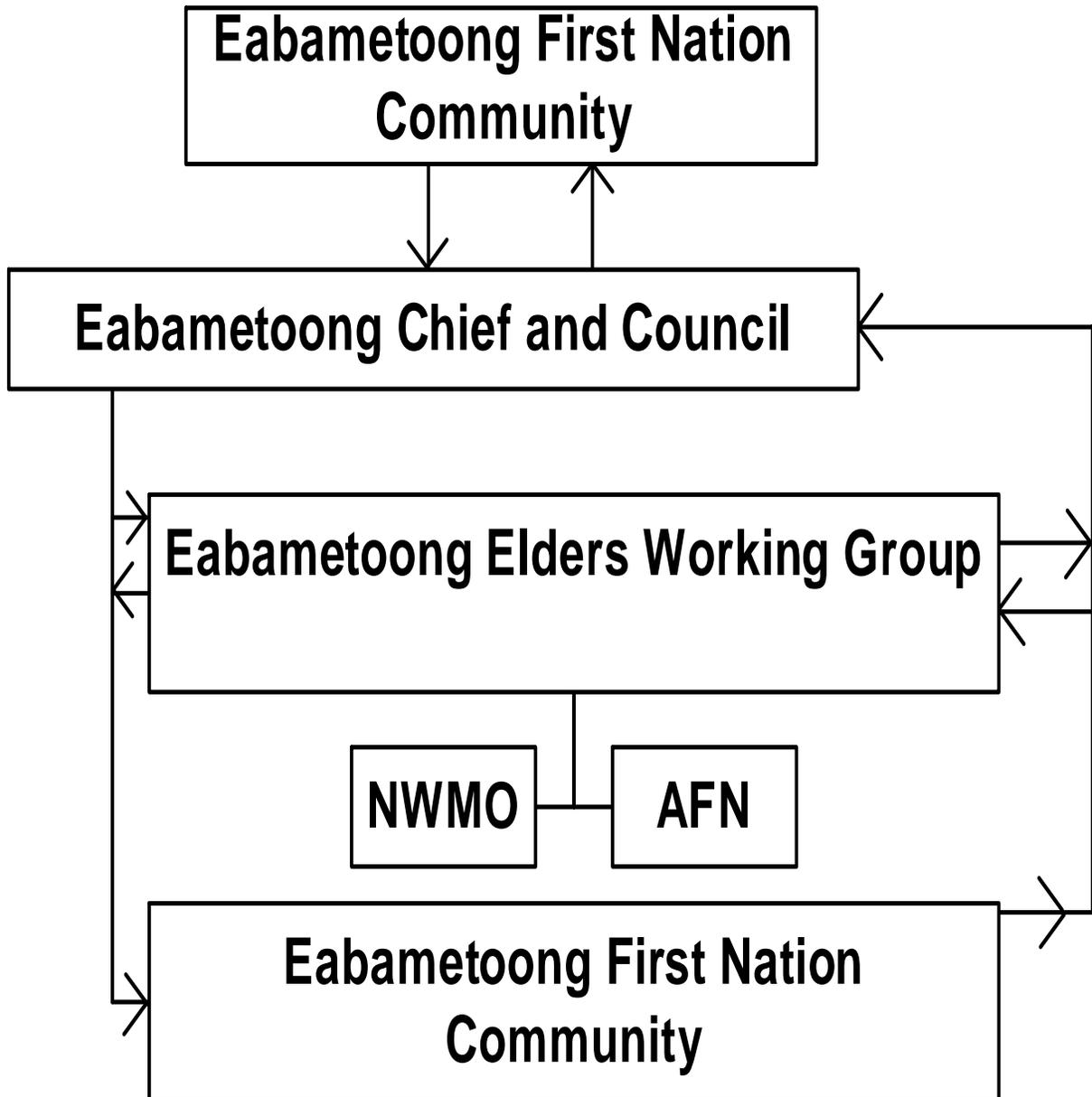


Map showing location of Eabametoong First Nation in Ontario



**Aerial View – Community of Eabametoong First Nation**

The following illustrates the organization structure of the Eabametoong First Nation Nuclear Waste Dialogue:



## **DISCUSSION OVERVIEW**

Between December 2004 and the end of January 2005, four meetings occurred at Eabametoong First Nation with the Elders. The purpose of the initial meeting was to engage in a dialogue process, and work with the Elders to address questions from the community from them regarding their understanding of Nuclear Waste and the information they required. Lillian Trapper, Northern Ontario Regional Co-ordinator, Nuclear Waste Dialogue, Assembly of First Nations, was also present to enhance the dialogue process and present and inform the Elders of the following:

- History of Nuclear Power Plants in Ontario
- What nuclear power is
- Where it comes from
- Where it is currently being stored
- Amounts?
- Why now?
- Identified potential issues and concerns

The initial meeting was centred around the following question: “Ontario has a need to explore options for the storage of spent nuclear fuel rods coming from the nuclear power plants in Ontario. There are a number of storage alternatives. What do you think are the issues for the storage options?” The focus of the meeting was to enter into a discussion that allowed for the collective wisdom of the Elders to address this question in a free flowing dialogue in their native tongue, Ojibwe. From this discussion, of what the Elders identified initially as issues and options came the following questions:

- Why now? This has been an issue for years. Why wait until the situation is reaching critical before engagement?
- Where will it be stored?
- Will it be returned to Saskatchewan where it came from?
- Once a storage area has been identified will the production continue or cease?
- If production continues, will it fill the storage up? Then, what will happen?
- Security at the site; will the threat of theft or terrorism be an issue?
- When will this happen?

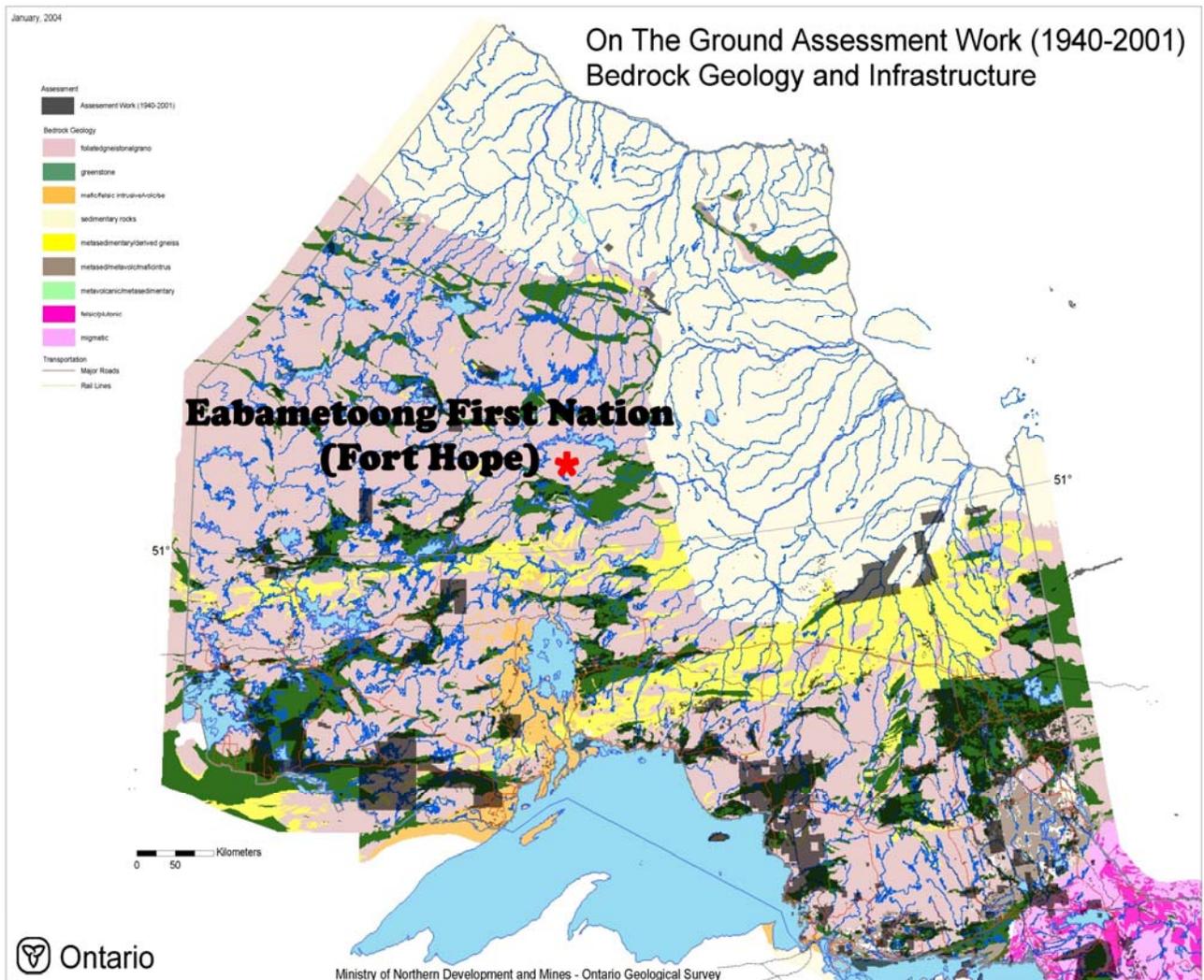
### **Deep Storage**

- Earthquakes, will the potential for an Earthquake be a threat?
- If the storage is situated deep underground, will it be subject to heat? One Elder stated that while working in deep mines he experienced some very high temperatures.
- The rock will split sometimes without reason. Has this been accounted for in the deep storage option? Also, over a long period of time, rock will move. Is this accounted for?
- What about flooding or water contamination? Could the deep storage affect our drinking water?

- What would happen if the housing around the rods breaks? Will it contaminate the area particularly in underground storage where we see the plans include substantial venting systems to the surface?

**Other**

- Will the storage create employment for nearby communities?
- What is the Canadian Shield?



Map of the Canadian Shield Spanning Ontario

## Meeting #2

This meeting was to follow-up discussion on the previous meeting. The Elders responded with more questions and concerns, and identified that they had actively engaged dialogue with the community and members of their families. At this point, what started out as an informative meeting regarding Nuclear Waste, morphed into a very interactive and pro-active dialogue beyond the scope of just the Elders. The Elders had brought up the following issues and concerns:

1. Strong opposition to the idea of any nuclear storage near Eabametoong, but with more information gathering, can make informed decisions in the future
2. Concern for the destruction of natural resources, animals and future generations of Eabametoong members
3. No value in Elders physically seeing a nuclear plant, because they feel they will only see the positive aspects and not the negative
4. Concern for not consulting the younger generation at this point in time, since they will be the ones to head this issue in the future
5. Elders want to know what is happening in other First Nation communities in this engagement process, recommend translating these regional meetings so they will be better informed
6. Mistrust in the government and its treaties, promises, etc.
7. Reiteration of the objective for the Elders to present this information to the Eabametoong community
8. Recommendation of drawing up a Working Group guidelines to follow for future meetings, etc
9. Concern for the work ethic of today's youth and whether a nuclear waste facility could be managed in the future. The youth seem to be very irresponsible
10. Reiterated the fact that there is no proposition at this point of time regarding the building of a nuclear waste site/facility; it is a dialogue mandated by the Federal Government.
11. Praise for the organization of a working group formed directly by the Elders and their willingness to seek more information; no other group has taken such initiative
12. Concern whether Elders or the Chief and Council should be making the decisions; are the Elders "being used" for someone to blame if something should go wrong
13. Concern that people are panicking too soon, as this issue wouldn't come to fruition for years and years
14. Recommendation to keep meetings going
15. Eabametoong, in their knowledge could be in a position to help other First Nations, wherever a site could be chosen in the future

The Elders initiated an Elders Working Group to focus on this issue and the Elders Working Group, suggested a community feast as the initial dialogue with the community as a whole.

### Meeting #3

This meeting was in preparation for the Elders to meet with Tony Hodge the following day. They wanted to be able to make a formal presentation to Mr. Hodge on behalf of the community and to let Mr. Hodge know that they were very serious in engaging dialogue on such a contentious issue. Ben Cheechoo, a former Grand Chief and current Tribal Chair at Matawa First Nations Management was on hand to advise the Elders and give his own view on a working dialogue and nuclear waste. He stressed that this dialogue was only a working group and that the meetings were not intended for a “yes” or “no” answer. He commended the overall initiative and process of dialogue that the Elders in the community were doing. He also stressed that the overall process will take a long time. The youth would look up to the Elders for advice and guidance in this matter in the future, and Elders will be informed from their own information gathering. Ben also commended the fact that the Elders were consulted first instead of the contemporary approach of seeking the consultation of the Chief and Council.

Reaction to Ben’s introduction and views was well received. Appreciation for an “outsider’s” view on the issue were welcomed. Ben was able to give an example that everyone could understand, i.e.; to build a house, you need to know how many boards to get, how much drywall to get, etc. This Elders Working Group would need the same type of information regarding nuclear waste. Information gathering is the key in order to make informed decisions.

Discussion from the Elders included the following:

- Suggestion came to come up with a name for the program. To have a contest with a prize for the name picked.
- Question asked as to whom would benefit from having a nuclear waste site installed . Answer was whoever owns the land.
- Suggest look at long-range planning. whether it will affect tourist camps, other Eabametoong businesses, etc.(if storage is in this area)
- Question asked how the nuclear waste would be transported up here. Answer could be by road or by rail. In any instance, communities along the way (i.e.; Sudbury, Hearst, Sault Ste. Marie, etc)...would definitely have a say as to if they wanted those trucks/trains to come through with those types of materials. Those communities would need to be satisfied that it is safe first.
- Question asked, if the nuclear waste caught on fire for whatever reason, how would it be put out?
- Suggestion to seek legal counsel for any future matters considering nuclear waste.
- Question asked, what form is this nuclear waste in?

- Question asked, why can't they figure out how to dispose of this waste if they created it??
- Comment: We can't keep blaming non-Natives for pollution. We are also to blame because we use ski-doo's, and go along with new technologies, and radiation is all around us.
- Suggestion to create a schedule so everyone will know when the meetings are, when reports should be done, and when the community feast should be planned for.
- If trip to see a nuclear plant happens, will being there affect pace makers, asthma, etc??

At this particular meeting, the Elders Working Group had come up with a list of items they felt they would need in order to continue working on this issue and to become more organized. They had already set-up an office to work out of at the Elders Community Home. This was a clear indication that the Elders were and are ready for the challenge of discussing an issue and presenting it to their community.

#### **Meeting #4**

##### Opening Prayer

This was the chance for the Elders to speak directly with Mr. Hodge as a representative of NWMO. Mr.Hodge discussed the history of nuclear development up to and including the development of an atom bomb. How the nuclear energy was developed out of wartime needs, and after people looked for alternatives for the newly discovered nuclear energy and that nuclear power plants were born out of that thinking. But at that time nuclear waste was not an issue. Now in 2005, it is an issue. However, upon reflection you cannot criticise previous thinking.

He was told that the community would be prepared to discuss the issues in general terms but that it wasn't to be construed as site specific negotiations. In April 2005 there is to be a publication of a draft report that would be subject to review with the submission of a final report in November 2005, and that the federal government would have the final say (on what was to happen to the nuclear waste). The cost of the solution would be born by the producers of nuclear waste, and not the government and that we would probably be looking at a 30-year timeline.

Elder John interrupted and said : “We must make sure that there is adequate education, even the basics of understanding where it comes from and what it is, has to be taught to the community”. “The community relies on diesel generators for its power and has absolutely no knowledge of nuclear power”. “The Elder working group wished to visit a facility to see how it is being stored now to look at how the electricity is produced but in order to make the visit we need to know, whether those of us with pace makers would be safe and whether photos could be taken to show the community we were at the site and it was safe”.

The following is a loose transcript and a *great example* of the interaction and initiative the Elders have taken, as well as a small representation of the wisdom and insight they bring to the dialogue.

**Elder Madeleine:** Wherever you put this stuff, you must speak to the people and the territory it's in to understand how they use the land and what this will mean to them.

**Ben Cheechoo:** The Elder raises a good and important point. You need to be able to inventory native values and map traditional use for wherever you put this stuff, because no matter where it goes, it will be in a First Nation's territory. Perhaps there is something we might be able to help you (to Tony) with in the future.

**Mike Rae:** We have already discussed the idea of developing the dictionary of terminology to ensure that the definitions work in the Ojibwe language and the Elders have stated their willingness to do this and to seek the assistance from Elders from other communities to ensure that the definitions will be understood by everyone. I think this is a good next step for the Elders, I also believe that a values mapping brainstorming session to identify the types of values the Elders speak of, would be a good idea, that way the Elders could identify the types of values they are speaking about.

**Tony Hodge:** The mapping of use and collection and inventory of values is incredibly important because it will assist in ensuring meaningful and honest dialogue. I would like you to tell me what you consider to be the right way to go.

**Temius Nate:** We need more resources to continue this process. This community has assumed an incredibly important undertaking that we hope will assist other First Nations in the future when you decide where you're going to put this stuff. We need more show and tell devices that people in the community can look at and feel and understand when you talk about things such as the rods – we need to see what they are. When you talk about the pellets that go into the rods, we would like to see them (not the dangerous ones).

**Elder Mary:** I am already talking to my family and my grandchildren about this and everyone is really interested what we (Elders), have to say. It is very important that we always speak the truth and know what it is we are talking about.

**Tony Hodge:** I completely agree with you and that is exactly the fashion in which the Nuclear Waste Management Organization operates.

**Temius Nate:** Fort Hope is already doing a Land Use Plan and inventorying its values. Perhaps if the NWMO was to support that process the end product would be a model they could use in the future.

**Elder Saul:** Please understand traditional knowledge is not given freely. It would not be easy for us to tell you everything we know. But thank you for coming today, we have learned a lot. Please do not rush us, but work very carefully with us. Traditional wisdom must be taken seriously. Thank you for coming.

**Elder Madeleine:** I support this (process) but we need time. Knowledge is passed down through time. We still talk about the visioning in the old days and we are still passing that knowledge down to our grandchildren. Thank you.

**Elder John:** It is important now that we have started this, that we finish it. We will walk next to you in friendship. Please show us the same respect. I got my traditional knowledge from my father's visions. He saw there was no end, but now I believe Mother Earth will not last.

**Elder Madeline:** I had a dream that we were walking as a group and there were 5 obstacles we had to overcome. The first obstacle in my dream was people protesting, but we must keep on going with this because it is for the people. I saw in my dream, that once we were past the 5<sup>th</sup> obstacle, it is smooth.

**Tony Hodge:** It is a great honour to have listened to your words of wisdom. I will share them with my colleagues at the NWMO. My recommendation will be that we continue to work together to better define and refine the process of communication between First Nation communities and the NWMO. I very much look forward to meeting with you in the near future and learning more. Thank you.



**Eabametoong First Nation Elders**

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Resource the Elders Working Group
- Develop Glossary of Terms
- Visit operational and storage sites
- Continue community dialogue
- Review NWMO reports
- Continue AFN Discussions
- Continue to work with Mike Rae, Cynthia Jourdain and Tony Hodge
- Bi-weekly meetings to update community responses to Elders

## CONCLUSION

*The initial engagement concept was designed to accommodate a series of short, focused meetings with the Elders to transfer information that would allow them to host a community information session. However, it became apparent from the outset that this had the potential to morph into a much more important process that could provide a framework of engagement that would have validity with any First Nation in Canada. Further, the uptake from the Elders clearly signalled the seriousness of their desire to understand the issue and provide informed feedback. This report presented in both Ojibwe and English represents the limited input from the Elders, to date. It is our contention, that the process be continued to a conclusion that satisfies the Elders, the community, and the Chief and Council, enabling them to provide informed, thoughtful and valid information to the NWMO, and most importantly based on both new knowledge and traditional understanding. We trust the NWMO is as prepared to embrace the validity of this work, as the Elders have been in embracing the needs of the NWMO.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eabametoong Chief and Council  
Eabametoong First Nation community  
Ben Cheechoo, Senior Policy Advisor, Matawa First Nations Management  
Mike Rae, Economic Development Advisor, Matawa First Nations Management  
Lillian Trapper, Northern Ontario Regional Co-ordinator, Nuclear Waste Dialogue, AFN  
Tony Hodge, NWMO  
Cynthia Jourdain, Partnership Development Advisor, Matawa First Nations Management

Special thanks to our Chief, Charlie O'Keese

# **APPENDICES**

## **A – Discussion Overview – Translated into Syllabics**

### **A- DISCUSSION OVERVIEW – TRANSLATED (SYLLABICS)**

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**Elder John:** It is important now that we have started this, that we finish it. We will walk next to you in friendship. Please show us the same respect. I got my traditional knowledge from my father's visions. He saw there was no end, but now I believe Mother Earth will not last.

**Elder Madeline:** I had a dream that we were walking as a group and there were 5 obstacles we had to overcome. The first obstacle in my dream was people protesting, but we must keep on going with this because it is for the people. I saw in my dream, that once we were past the 5<sup>th</sup> obstacle, it is smooth.

**Tony Hodge:** It is a great honour to have listened to your words of wisdom. I will share them with my colleagues at the NWMO. My recommendation will be that we continue to work together to better define and refine the process of communication between First Nation communities and the NWMO. I very much look forward to meeting with you in the near future and learning more. Thank you.