

# Cree Engagement Activities Report

## National Marine Conservation Area Feasibility Assessment Project



**Cree Nation Government** 

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document presents a summary of the various engagement activities that were carried out during the feasibility study of a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in the Cree zone of the Eeyou Marine Region. This region corresponds to the eastern portion of the James Bay from Waskaganish up to Chisasibi. Whapmagoostui, being located in the Cree-Inuit overlap joint zone, will not be included in the first phase of the NMCA. However, participants from Whapmagoostui have been included in the assessment of the feasibility study. Three rounds of engagement activities took place: in October 2023, a workshop with community leaders from Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi took place in Montréal. In February 2024, information sessions were held with the general population in Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi. They were followed by engagement sessions in the same communities in May and June 2024. Additionally, an information session took place in Whapmagoostui in June 2024.

Throughout the process, the project received a high level of support, which only increased as the sessions went on. Below are the main themes that emerged from the engagement activities.

**Preservation and Promotion of the Cree Way of Life, Culture, and Language:** participants viewed the NMCA as an excellent tool to help preserve and promote the Cree way of life, Cree culture, and the Cree language, all while promoting Cree leadership. They emphasized that an NMCA could provide cultural learning opportunities both on the water and in the communities for the Cree youth and for non-Cree visitors.

**Access and Safe Travels to Offshore Waters and Islands:** participants saw the NMCA as a way to help improve access to offshore waters and islands, which is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive, particularly in Waskaganish and Eastmain.

**Food Security: Traditional and New Food Sources:** numerous participants were worried about food security, particularly as climate change continues to impact traditional food sources. However, they argued that an NMCA could provide opportunities for the Crees to identify new species to be harvested or fished.

**Tourism and Other Job Opportunities:** participants were excited about the numerous jobs that could be created through an NMCA. While they were attracted by tourism jobs, they were also interested in jobs that would allow them to be out on the water, such as marine biologists or guardians. Youth were particularly excited about the various job opportunities.

**Coastal Marine Protection:** participants were optimistic that an NMCA could help improve monitoring and research into the coastal area and increase its protection in this way.

Participants also expressed several concerns, largely related to the impacts of increased tourism and safety and security on the water. They worried about lacking the resources and support to manage the NMCA. Some participants were concerned about the time required before an NMCA is implemented. There was a lot of emphasis on the necessity of Cree leadership for the project. Finally, participants wished that the name of the James Bay could be replaced by the ancestral Cree name, Wiinipaakw. However, these concerns were not so significant as to decrease support for the NMCA project.

# INTRODUCTION

## Context of the Present Report

The following document presents a summary of the various engagement activities that were carried out during the feasibility study concerning the establishment of a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in the Eeyou Marine Region.

In 2019 the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada signed a MOU to carry out an assessment of the feasibility of establishing a national marine conservation area (NMCA) in the Eeyou Marine Region. After the signing of the MOU, engagement activities were initiated by the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada to introduce the NMCA project. However, efforts to carry out engagement sessions were delayed due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic from 2020 to 2022, and due to forest fires in 2023 in Eeyou Istchee.

## NMCA Workshop – October 2023

In October 2023, the engagement portion of the feasibility assessment began with a workshop on the NMCA project with coastal community representatives. This workshop, which took place in Montréal, allowed participants to express their thoughts on potential opportunities, issues, and reflections related to the project. The project was presented through four themes: **Culture and Heritage; Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology; Tourism and Economic Activities; and Feasibility, Governance, and Legal Issues**. Participants' perceived opportunities, issues, and reflections related to the project were collected for each of these themes.

## Information Sessions – February 2024

The findings from the October 2023 workshop served as a basis to further engage the coastal Cree communities with information sessions in February 2024 and Engagement Sessions in May and June 2024. These sessions took place in the coastal communities adjacent to the study area: Eastmain, Waskaganish, Wemindji, and Chisasibi. A fifth Information Session was held in the community of Whapmagoostui in June 2024. The information sessions took the format of an open house session and addressed the following themes: the different protection initiatives in Eeyou Istchee, maps of the study area, the Cree conservation strategy, the benefits and restrictions related to an NMCA, the roles of Parks Canada, the Government of Québec, and the CNG in the governance and management of an NMCA, and future steps and timeline.

## Engagement Sessions (May-June 2024)

In May and June 2024, representatives from the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada returned to Eastmain, Waskaganish, Wemindji and Chisasibi to carry out engagement sessions related to the project with the general public. Sessions were carried out with a diverse range of community members in each community, including youth, women, land users, and economic development workers. In each session, the NMCA project was presented through storytelling that sought to engage the Crees through a culturally adapted communication approach. The story used

to present the NMCA project followed four themes: **Management, Culture, Opportunities,** and **Ecosystem**, mirroring the themes used during the NMCA workshop in October 2023. The main objective of the engagement sessions was to listen to the opinions of a variety of community members.

### **Structure of the Present Report**

This document presents the findings from all three engagement activities that took place for the NMCA feasibility study. The first report focuses on the October 2023 workshop, the second relates the February 2024 information sessions (as well as the June 2024 information session carried out in Whapmagoostui), and the third presents the process and results of the May/June 2024 engagement sessions. The tools and materials used for each activity are presented in the annex.

# **NMCA TECHNICAL WORKSHOP REPORT**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document presents a summary of a technical workshop organized by the Cree Nation Government, in collaboration with Parks Canada, and with support from BC2 Inter-Nation Collaboration to initiate a region-wide community reflection and dialogue around the idea of establishing a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in the Eeyou Marine Region and the potential impact it could have on Cree communities in the region.

The workshop session served as the launch for the feasibility study currently being carried out by the Cree Nation Government (CNG). The purpose of the feasibility study is to study the potential added value and impacts, collect community feedback regarding perceived opportunities and risks, and to determine whether the establishment of an NMCA, in collaboration with Parks Canada, would align with Cree values and support the interests and needs of the Cree communities situated along the eastern coast of James Bay. The workshop was jointly organized and delivered by members of the BC2 Inter-Nation Collaboration team, the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada in Montréal on October 25-26, 2023.

This report summarises the workshop objectives, methods, activities, and outcomes. It also presents an overview of the content covered in the presentations for the four thematic workshop sessions:

- **Feasibility, Governance, and Legal Issues;**
- **Culture and Heritage;**
- **Wildlife, Habitat and Ecology; and**
- **Tourism and Economic Activities.**

The key outcomes of the focus group discussions per theme are also presented. The **main takeaways** from the focus group discussions centred on acknowledgement by the group that an NMCA presents significant opportunities to **preserve and promote Cree culture** beyond and within the Cree communities. The potential **benefits for Cree youth** were often stated. At the same time, the group raised concern over the possibility of **considerable challenges related to the development of tourism** anchored on an NMCA, namely, **the current lack of local capacity, potential threats to cultural security, and increased access to non-Indigenous visitors posing a threat to environmental protection.**

A brief conclusion includes recommendations for topics to cover during the public engagement sessions. The consultations will be an opportunity to gather information and perspectives from within each community, which will contribute to the NMCA Feasibility Study. Finally, the Annex provides complementary information, such as the complete list of participants; titles for each presentation; detailed notes from the focus group discussion per theme; and tables that synthesize the main takeaways from the discussions, organized by common themes.

# INTRODUCTION

As an initial step in the feasibility study process, the purpose of the workshop was to bring together representatives from coastal Cree First Nations, Cree Nation Government (CNG), Parks Canada (PC), Cree entities, Eeyou Marine Region (EMR) Institutions of Public Government (IPGs), and researchers to discuss, exchange, and brainstorm some of the key themes of importance for the development of an NMCA concept and vision. The intention is that the outcomes of these discussions will serve as the foundation to develop workshop questions and activities for upcoming public engagements sessions within each Cree community to discuss the concept and explore the feasibility of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region.

Representatives from the five coastal Cree communities: **Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, Chisasibi, and Whapmagoostui**, some of whom are involved in the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission, were invited to participate. Individuals who represent specific regional interests, such as the Cree Trappers Association, Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association, and the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board, were also invited and participated in the workshop. Researchers who have conducted research projects within the Eeyou Marine Region and that could help inform and frame the discussion around specific themes were invited to present their work and findings to the group. A complete list of participants can be found in the Annex of this report.

## Organization of the Technical Workshop

The CNG initiated the organisation of the NMCA technical workshop in collaboration with Parks Canada with support from the BC2 Inter-Nation Collaboration team. The CNG was responsible for inviting participants, assuring a regional representation, as well as contacting the researchers to present along the key themes: **Culture and Heritage; Wildlife, Habitat and Ecology; and Tourism and Economic Activities**. In conjunction with Parks Canada, CNG was also responsible for presenting the **Feasibility, Governance, and Legal Issues** related to creating an NMCA in Eeyou Istchee. BC2 supported the planning, development of activities, and preparation of workshop materials designed to help facilitate open discussions about the concept of an NMCA anchored on the themes stated above.

## Workshop Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The NMCA Technical Workshop served as the launching point to begin the discussion around a potential NMCA designation for the Eeyou Marine Region. One of the **main objectives** was to present the concept of an NMCA and inform the group on what it is and how it works, including examples where collaboration with Indigenous Peoples has been integral to the creation and management of NMCAs elsewhere. **Another objective** was to stimulate discussion around the concept of an NMCA, specifically regarding potential opportunities and challenges, that it could pose to the Cree way of life if established within the EMR. The intention was to generate creative and critical thinking within the group in considering the NMCA potential and begin the reflection toward a collective vision for an NMCA, if it were to be created.

The **primary expected outcome** of the technical workshop was that participants would leave with a better understanding of what an NMCA is and what potential impacts it could have on the territory if established. In addition, the results of the discussions were expected to help the CNG gain a better understanding of unique and common interests and concerns as expressed by representatives from the Cree communities so it can address them during the upcoming public engagement sessions in each community.

## Methods and Tools Developed for the Workshop

Given that the main objective of the NMCA Technical Workshop was to encourage participants to reflect on the information presented and share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns as it relates to the potential creation of an NMCA in the EMR, it was agreed upon that the best method to ensure dialogue would be to facilitate focus group discussions by theme after each series of presentations. BC2 created the visual materials to accompany the discussion, including a large poster with a circle drawn in the centre and divided equally into three sections labeled: **opportunities; issues; and reflections**. Printed maps of the Eeyou Marine Region were also provided as a visual aid and to help inspire discussion among participants.

In collaboration with CNG and Parks Canada, the BC2 team drafted key open-ended questions designed to ignite conversation and debate within the three focus groups. It was agreed that BC2 would facilitate the discussion, using the questions as prompts for dialogue as needed. To accommodate those who may be less inclined to speak, it was decided that small note stickers would be used as a tool to enable people to write down their thoughts in their own words. The stickers also served as a note-taking tool for the facilitators to record the comments from participants who preferred to speak aloud rather than write. The focus groups discussions were also recorded using a mobile phone application to have a reference for the compilation and synthesis of the information collection, if needed. Photographic scans of the posters with the note stickers are presented in the Annex. The Annex also contains tables that present the content written on the stickers for opportunities and challenges, while the outcomes from the reflections are addressed solely in the text.

A noted limitation of the workshop method used is that some people in the focus groups were more comfortable speaking than writing on the note stickers provided. In this case, the facilitator took note of the comments while the person spoke (first confirming that the person agreed to have their words written down). In a few cases, the handwriting was difficult to decipher during the compilation and analysis of the outcomes. However, the audio recordings of the focus group discussion helped fill most of these gaps in understanding.

# 1 WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Each thematic session began with a series of presentations that were curated specifically to inform the participants about certain aspects related to National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCAs) and to frame the roundtable discussions. Below is a summary of the content presented during these informational sessions. For those interested, the presentations are available on the Cree Nation Government website ([eeyouconservation.ca](http://eeyouconservation.ca)).

## 1.1 FEASIBILITY, GOVERNANCE, AND LEGAL ISSUES

The first series of presentations provided the background information necessary to explain how the CNG has arrived at this moment where it has chosen to conduct an NMCA Feasibility Study for the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR). This included a summary of the Wemindji-University research project, **Tawich (Marine) Conservation Area Project**, which began in 2007, and is credited with initiating the idea of creating a marine conservation area, such as an NMCA, in eastern James Bay. The CNG also presented an overview of its efforts to designate protected areas within Eeyou Istchee, including the **Cree Regional Conservation Strategy** published in 2014 and how the proposal of an NMCA also aligns with the **Eeyou Marine Regional Land Claims Agreement (EMRLA)**, signed in 2012. The CNG also presented the next steps, such as community consultations to take place during Winter/Spring 2024, as part of the NMCA Feasibility Study. Parks Canada explained how the NMCA could serve as an effective planning and management tool for the Crees to manage the Eeyou Marine Region while supporting the continuation of traditional cultural practices. In terms of governance and legal issues, it was emphasized that it is reasonable to expect that the establishment of an NMCA would add value for the Cree communities, but that it is important to clearly define roles and responsibilities in the management of the protected marine area to ensure the NMCA does not impede on treaty rights and traditional Cree cultural practices.

## 1.2 CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Both Parks Canada and the CNG presented on the cultural and heritage aspects to consider in conducting the feasibility study for an NMCA in the EMR. Parks Canada presented its approach to cultural heritage in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and the commemoration tools used, such as recognition of a specific person, place, or event. They also presented their collaborative approach through their **Indigenous Stewardship Framework**, which includes the following elements: **Shared Governance; Practices on Lands, Waters, and Ice; Education and Awareness; Relationships; Acknowledgements; Economic Opportunities; Indigenous Knowledge Systems**. It was emphasized that the intention is to create an agreement that supports the Indigenous communities with whom Parks Canada partners to create protected areas, such as NMCAs. The CNG's Department of Social and Cultural Development provided an overview of cultural heritage research conducted in the region to date. The value of narratives and stories to inform cultural heritage research was discussed. Characteristics that help identify and confirm places of cultural heritage value included: drawing a living from the land; dwelling on the land; traveling; and places of encounter. Cree place names, archeological sites, and legends were also mentioned as indicators of cultural heritage value. Research relevant to the NMCA Feasibility Study, such as place name surveys; mapping surveys; and audio and video recordings, plus recommendations for future research and archiving in the context of the NMCA Feasibility Study was also presented. Questions were posed as how best to move forward with identifying, documenting and archiving information of value to cultural heritage recognition and protection in the context of an NMCA project

### 1.3 WILDLIFE, HABITAT, AND ECOLOGY

The presentations on Wildlife, Habitat and Ecology focused on how Western science and Indigenous knowledge can integrate to provide a more holistic understanding of ecosystems and their components and lead to more effective conservation efforts. Parks Canada presented on Ecological Knowledge and their approach to integrating Western science with Indigenous ecological knowledge and how the information is shared and used in the establishment and management of NMCAs. The use of GIS mapping tools to incorporate information based on Indigenous knowledge, observations and concerns for conservation and cultural access was also presented as an example of how such a collaboration could benefit the Cree communities in protecting culturally significant areas that might otherwise be overlooked by Western scientists. The Niskamoon Corporation presented its Eeyou Coastal Habitat Comprehensive Research Project, which covered the Eelgrass ecosystem and the impact of the La Grande hydroelectric complex. It included information on eelgrass from the Western science perspective with input from land users, noting eelgrass's sensitivity to environmental changes and the ecosystem services it provides (ex. mitigates erosion and cleans water) and socio-ecological services (ex. provide food for wildlife; reliable goose hunting zones). The ongoing research studies relies on monitoring conducted by land users. There is an effort to align the research with the interests and needs of the Crees to develop strategies, action plans and toolkits for the Cree communities to use to continue to build ecological knowledge of the area.

### 1.4 TOURISM AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The presentation for this theme focused mostly on tourism opportunities and other activities linked to tourism, such as transport, logistics, and services. Parks Canada presented the types of economic opportunities that align well with an NMCA: **fisheries and aquaculture; Indigenous entrepreneurship; and tourism**. It was noted that there was insufficient data to determine the potential for fisheries and aquaculture during this NMCA Feasibility Study, but it that it is an opportunity worth considering. It was noted that specific services could be developed to support the NMCA and to support tourism, especially in the transport and logistics industries. Indigenous eco-cultural tourism was highlighted as an economic opportunity that an NMCA could help foster. It was stated that a current trend in the identified within the tourism industry is marked by a notable increase in the number of tourists who seek authentic, cultural experiences. Parks Canada noted that the presence of an NMCA could create an attractive destination to develop Indigenous tourism within the Cree communities of the EMR.

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) presented an historical overview of its establishment, its roots in the JBNQA and its relations with other tourism associations at the regional, provincial, to national scale. A presentation of the state of Indigenous Tourism in Québec, with statistics that indicate much potential for growth as interest in Indigenous cultural experiences becomes more mainstream across Canada and internationally. Elements **to promote in developing tourism offering, include experience and education of Cree culture; adventure (hunting; fishing); and immersion in nature**. According to COTA, the aspects to consider when **developing a tourism destination** can be distilled into three points: **access; product; and marketing**. It was acknowledged that the EMR and the Cree communities have a lot to offer in terms of a unique and quality touristic experience, but all the pieces need to come together for it to be a success.

## 2 FOCUS GROUP THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

Following the presentations, workshop participants divided into three focus groups to discuss three of the four presentation topics: **Culture and Heritage; Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology; and Tourism and Economic Activities**. A facilitator accompanied each focus group, posing questions to encourage participants to reflect on the thematic topic, identify related opportunities and challenges, as well as share any other reflections they may have had about each topic as it relates to the NMCA proposal.

The outcomes of the focus group discussions are synthesized below. The comments are organized by opportunities and challenges, then by the main recurring subthemes that arose during the discussions. A summary of key takeaways is also presented along with the additional reflections that were shared during each thematic discussion. For a more detailed compilation of comments, including a synthesis of the comments organized by subtheme, refer to the images of data collection posters and data tables in the Annex.



### 2.1 CULTURE AND HERITAGE

#### 2.1.1 Opportunities

Following the Culture and Heritage presentations, the following ideas on the **NMCA as an opportunity** arose in the focus groups, namely:

- **Culture preservation and land protection;**
- **Cultural continuity;**
- **Education of youth;**
- **Economic opportunities and the upgrade of infrastructure;**
- **Exchange between Western and Traditional Knowledge; and**

– **Governance.**



***Culture Preservation and Land Protection***

The community representatives agreed that an NMCA could serve as an opportunity for history (and stories) to be shared from a **Cree perspective**. According to many participants, the activities that could take place on the land and in the waters could **promote the Cree language** and encourage the use of **Cree place names**. They aspire that, across the coast, a collective glossary of terms with consistent terminology in Cree be created and institutionalized.

Community representatives also consider that an NMCA could serve as an opportunity to promote **cultural practices**, such as the use of canoes and the construction of wigwams. The NMCA could additionally help protect **heritage sites** and other sites of cultural importance (such as shipwrecks under the water). With more resources, the land could become an **open-air laboratory where they could experiment with new technology** (in agriculture, transport, and other fields). According to many participants, the concept of an **NMCA implies protection and preservation**. They expressed hope that the behaviour and attitude of visitors would be more considerate given that they would be entering a designated protected marine area.

***Cultural Continuity***

The focus group participant viewed the NMCA as an opportunity to **share Cree culture** with a broader audience. They stated that organized tours linked to an NMCA could be a particularly effective way of **sharing stories and legends**, including about merpeople, underwater dogs, and spiritual places. It was also mentioned that the **Cree language** could be promoted through an NMCA, notably through **place names** and the development of audiovisual material and graphic novels.

Community representatives also shared that an NMCA could allow for the Cree to highlight their connection with the land and their knowledge of and perspectives on the environment. They identified potential to help strengthen **connection and pride in the land**, while also allowing for Cree perspectives and knowledge to be shared with tourists.

***Education of Youth***

Another key theme from the focus group was the opportunity that an NMCA could provide to help educate youth in multiple ways. Community leaders expressed interest in the possibility of an NMCA providing opportunities for youth to learn the **Cree language**. According to several participants, an

NMCA could lead to the creation of **Cree-language graphic novels** or make language learning more accessible.

Community representatives also highlighted the numerous ways in which youth could gain **traditional knowledge of the land** with the NMCA serving as an outdoor classroom. Many participants see it as a way for youth to learn more about **ecology, biology, and culture**, and think that an NMCA could help improve youth access and connection to the land. Several participants raised the possibility of youth attending summer camps, participating in gap year internships, or similar programming on the land.

#### ***Economic opportunities and upgrade of infrastructure***

Community representatives agreed that an NMCA could be leveraged to improve economic conditions and infrastructure for the communities located in the Eeyou Marine Region. Many representatives linked the anticipated influx of tourists with **job creation opportunities**, especially as tour guides. This anticipated increase in tourism was also viewed by some as a chance for community growth. The notion of inclusive ecotourism was also brought up, with participants mentioning the **promotion of Cree knowledge** and the inclusion of diverse professionals, archaeologists, youth, and elders.

Focus group participants also mentioned that an NMCA could lead to **infrastructure upgrades**. They also spoke about the possibility of facilitating access to islands in James Bay, as well as that of testing new technologies, including **electric boats and vehicles**.

#### ***Exchange in Western and Indigenous Knowledge***

Representatives in the focus groups viewed the idea of an NMCA as an opportunity to **combine traditional Cree knowledge with Western knowledge** by working together. They envisioned that both sides could learn from each other, and that Western research could be assigned to better align with Cree interests. Several participants mentioned the importance of building **trust and transparency** through an NMCA and making sure that the relationship between Parks Canada and the Cree is equal and follows an approach rooted in **decolonization**.

#### ***Governance***

The focus groups acknowledge that the creation of an NMCA could serve as an opportunity for the Cree and non-Cree visitors to develop a **better understanding of Cree land rights and stewardship**. Participants also evoked the possibility of using existing legal structures (notably the CNG) and new partners **to increase protection of the land adjacent to the protected area**.

### **2.1.2 Challenges**

Following the presentations on Culture and Heritage, the following ideas concerning the **challenges related to an NMCA** arose in the focus groups:

- **Capacity;**
- **Governance;**
- **Threat to cultural practices;**
- **Risk of disappropriation;**
- **Protection of the territory;**
- **Logistics and safety.**

#### ***Capacity***

Several community representatives expressed concerns about the capacity needed to manage an NMCA, both in terms of **environmental and human resources**. They also mentioned that any



regulations must be adapted to respect the capacity of the communities. Another participant also mentioned that if traditional food is to be served to tourists, the time and resources needed to do this must be considered.

#### ***Governance***

The focus group participants identified several challenges related to the governance of an NMCA. These included the **status of non-Indigenous people with the NMCA, and the role of regulations currently imposed by various ministries** (notably the MAPAQ). Other challenges linked to governance that representatives mentioned include determining the **jurisdiction of an NMCA** and the time it might take to reach a **consensus**. Another participant also mentioned that **bureaucracy** could impede efficient governance.

#### ***Cultural Practices***

Community representatives mentioned several issues that an NMCA could cause regarding cultural practices. Each focus group expressed concern about the impact of an NMCA on **hunting and other cultural activities**. To mitigate this impact, some participants suggested paying particularly close attention to the scheduling of tourism activities, while several others stated the importance of **developing the project around Cree practices**, rather than tourist seasons. There were also several concerns raised about the impact of tourists who want to hunt on the land. Participants referenced a caribou hunt with non-Indigenous people that went poorly in the past as a point of caution.

#### ***Risk of Disappropriation***

During the focus group discussions, community representatives expressed concerns regarding the possibility that an NMCA could cause communities to **lose their connection with the land** in the protected area. They hoped that **Cree knowledge and culture** would be valued and suggested several means of achieving this objective. Notably, they suggest that **only local Cree companies be allowed to provide tours**, that traditional knowledge be valorized through **Indigenous Guardians**, and that concerted efforts and investments be made to **ensure that youth and other community members benefit from and remain connected to the protected area**.

#### ***Protection of the Territory***

Community representatives expressed several concerns regarding the protection of the territory. It was agreed that all visitors respect the **Leave No Trace principles**, and that fauna and flora (with a special mention of geese) are sufficiently protected. There was an expressed interest that cultural landscapes be well-protected by **maintaining the confidentiality of cultural and sacred places** and by **limiting access and gatherings in sacred places**. Several participants also mentioned the potential negative impact that external factors, such as mining projects, dam upgrades, and passing ships, could have on an NMCA. Finally, participants also identified the need for more complete data on depth of James Bay to be able to better protect the area.

#### ***Logistics and Safety***

Workshop participants had several worries concerning safety and logistics. Multiple participants mentioned that navigation in the area is very difficult. Others spoke about safety in general and the dangers inherent to the area. Beyond the safety concerns within the area, participants also spoke about the challenging logistics that are needed to reach the area.

### **2.1.3 Summary and Takeaways**

Based upon the number of comments, the themes in which participants see the most significant opportunities related to **Culture Preservation and Land Protection** as well as **Cultural Continuity**.

The potential for an NMCA to generate opportunities related to Education of Youth and Economic Benefits and Opportunities were also raised by several participants.

The **challenges identified** by the participants can be grouped into the following themes: **Capacity, Governance, Cultural Practices, Risk of Disappropriation, Protection of the Territory, and Logistics and Safety**. Among these themes, more comments fell under the categories of **Protection of the Territory and Cultural Practices** than any other. Comments from the participants indicate that they are concerned with protecting the environment, especially in the context of increased tourism, and ensuring that cultural practices (such as hunting) are not negatively affected.

Participants did not share many other **reflections** during the focus group discussions on Culture and Heritage. However, several participants mentioned **Cree habits or customs** (such as telling stories and legends in the winter), while another participant questioned the process in which **Cree values** would be identified to serve as the guide for the NMCA (ex. who determines the values).

## 2.2 WILDLIFE, HABITAT, AND ECOLOGY

### 2.2.1 Opportunities

Following the presentations on Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology, the following ideas on **NMCA as an opportunity** arose in the focus groups:

- **Improve monitoring;**
- **Management and supervision of research activities;**
- **Protection and preservation of the environment;**
- **Consolidation of cultural knowledge;**
- **Increase collaboration between different actors;**
- **Benefits for local population.**

#### ***Improve Monitoring***

One of the most widely mentioned opportunities that focus group participants identified is the improvement and increase in monitoring programs. Participants expressed a desire to monitor a variety of elements of an NMCA, including **climate change impacts, ice, marine mammals, and fish populations**. Participants also hope to diversify monitoring techniques, notably with the integration of **e-DNA monitoring and involvement of community members** in monitoring activities.

#### ***Management and Supervision of Research Activities***

Community representatives identified an NMCA as a way to improve the management and supervision of research activities in and around the NMCA. Some of the participants hope to regulate research, be it through the **issuing of permits**, by **centralizing** it in one place, or by being sure to **not over-solicit communities**. Another one also mentioned the precautionary approach that Parks Canada takes to data analysis. One participant mentioned that an NMCA could lead to more research opportunities for the water.

#### ***Protection and Preservation of the Environment***

Focus group participants spoke extensively about the opportunities for environmental protection and preservation that an NMCA could provide. Several participants spoke about **eelgrass**, with the hope that an NMCA could help restore this depleted resource. Others are hopeful that an NMCA could help **protect flora and fauna** (such as beluga whales and their nurseries), and in so doing, **protect**

**traditional activities** such as fishing and berry picking. The opportunity to **prevent development** was also mentioned by a participant.

#### ***Consolidation of Cultural Knowledge***

Community representatives affirmed that an NMCA could help enable the consolidation of cultural knowledge. Many participants spoke about the opportunity to integrate traditional knowledge into activities that would be created in conjunction with an NMCA, such as **research projects**, **Indigenous-run research institutions**, **ecosystem and species restoration**, and **youth education**. Several participants also mentioned that an NMCA could serve as a catalyst to **confirm Cree place names** and **improve baseline information**, thereby **preserving traditional knowledge**.

#### ***Increase Collaboration Between Different Actors***

Focus group participants viewed the concept of an NMCA as a potential means to increase collaboration between the numerous actors involved in an NMCA. One participant mentioned the advantage of getting everyone on the same radio station. Several participants spoke about **increasing collaboration between Parks Canada and Cree communities**, including referring to Parks Canada expertise to structure and support the project. Some participants also mentioned working with **Hydro-Québec** to encourage them to switch to wind or solar energy, while others spoke about relationship-building with **the Inuit**.

#### ***Benefits for Local Population***

Participants see several opportunities to benefit the local population. One such example is using Parks Canada to help **increase local management capacity**. Another participant also proposed storing the results and data from various research projects in a **public database**, while yet another spoke about the chance to integrate an NMCA into **local school lessons**.

### **2.2.2 Challenges**

Following the presentations on Wildlife, Habitat and Ecology, the following ideas on **NMCA as a challenge** arose in the focus groups:

- **Hydro-Québec;**
- **Governance issues;**
- **Negative impact of NMCA on traditional cultural activities;**
- **Risk of environmental damage;**
- **Logistical issues.**

#### ***Hydro-Québec***

Many participants mentioned Hydro-Québec as a major issue for an NMCA. One person spoke about the role of Hydro-Québec in general, while another mentioned the impact of their projects on the **ecological health of the marine area**. Yet another participant spoke about the **impact of Hydro-Québec's dams on hunting**.

#### ***Governance Issues***

Although community representatives mentioned the increased collaboration between different actors as an opportunity, they also recognized that governance of the area could be a challenge as well. Most participants agreed that **clearly defining the role and territory of each player** (federal, provincial, Cree) will be a challenge moving forward.

### ***Negative Impact of NMCA on Traditional Cultural Activities***

Many participants expressed concern that the increase in tourism could **threaten hunting traditions and other cultural activities**. Community representatives also expressed concerns regarding the possible negative perception that various coastal Cree communities might have of the plan for an NMCA in the EMR, but this was not elaborated upon.

### ***Risk of Environmental Damage***

Community representatives expressed serious concern about **climate change** and the impact that this could have on the EMR and specifically, an NMCA. Participants in the focus groups expressed concerns about invasive species and the integration of new species in the area. One participant also expressed concern of the water currents and the impact that their fluctuations could have on hunting activities. Finally, other participants expressed concern that an NMCA could have negatively impact goose populations.

### ***Logistical Issues***

Focus group participants mentioned a lack of **infrastructure** in the community as a potential challenge in the establishment of an NMCA. Another issue that was mentioned is the possibility of shipping channels or other zones in the James Bay being excluded from an NMCA. Participants expressed concerned that such exclusions could limit the effectiveness of an NMCA. The comments from participants largely reflected concerns about the capacity to manage and protect an NMCA to the necessary extent.

## **2.2.3 Summary and Takeaways**

Based upon the number of comments, the two categories in which participants see the most potential for **opportunities** are **Improvement of monitoring** and **Collaboration between different actors**. Identified opportunities related to **the Consolidation of cultural knowledge** as well as **Protection and preservation of the environment** were also frequently raised.

In general, workshop participants identified **fewer challenges** related to Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology, than the other focus group discussion themes (Culture and Heritage; Tourism and Economic Activities). Nevertheless, many participants expressed concern about the impact of **Hydro-Québec** and its existing infrastructure on the ecosystems. Many commented about the **risk of environmental damages**, as well as **governance challenges** that would need to be addressed if the CNG were to go forward with the creation of an NMCA with Parks Canada.

Most of the participants' **reflections** were centred on ecological concerns. Several participants wondered about the **role that an NMCA could play in wildlife restoration** (both plant and animal species), while others were curious as to the **increase in data on wildlife** that could come about due to the presence of an NMCA. Several other participants **reflected on the current and future impact of Hydro-Québec**.

## **2.3 TOURISM AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

### **2.3.1 Opportunities**

Following the presentations on Tourism and Economic Activities, the following ideas on the **NMCA as an opportunity** arose in the focus groups:

- **Valorization of Cree culture and leadership;**
- **Promotion of the region to a wider audience;**

- **Infrastructure development;**
- **Economic spinoffs for local communities;**
- **Youth (re)engagement in their culture.**

### ***Valorization of Cree Culture and Leadership***

Nearly all participants viewed the potential creation of an NMCA as an **opportunity to valorize Cree culture and promote Cree leadership**. Participants mentioned not only the idea of sharing their culture with adventure seeking-tourists from the South, but also that an NMCA could help encourage Indigenous tourists from other Nations to visit the Eeyou Marine Region. Other participants spoke to the possibility of using an NMCA to encourage collaboration across James Bay to include the Cree Nations in Ontario in the project.

Participants suggested numerous ways to **enhance the cultural experience for visitors while promoting the Cree way of life**. These include training guides in storytelling and offering tours to collect mussels or other traditional foods. The idea to develop wellness-based tourism packages that emphasize the value of being removed from technology and immersed in a unique natural environment. Others suggested the potential to invest in valorizing Cree history and historical site with guided visits to historical and archaeological sites, creating an interpretative centre, and restoring certain historical sites. Finally, many participants mentioned the importance of translating brochures and other material into Cree to promote the Cree language and culture.

Participants also agreed that an NMCA may serve as an opportunity for **Cree leadership** to take centre stage. For instance, some participants mentioned the importance of ensuring that the programming is Cree-led, as well as making sure that Cree decide what message to convey. Additionally, some participants consider that the **CNG has a role to play in encouraging tourism**.

### ***Promoting the Region to a Wider Audience***

During the focus groups, participants spoke of their desire to promote the James Bay region to tourists. They agreed that an NMCA could help achieve this goal. One participant mentioned the bird watching and wildlife observation opportunities an NMCA could enable, while others spoke of using the **NMCA concept to promote tourism** in general.

### ***Infrastructure Development***

Community representatives viewed an NMCA as an opportunity to **instigate infrastructure development** within their communities. Numerous participants spoke of the opportunity that an NMCA could create in terms of improved accessibility to the region, notably to Charlton Island. One idea touched on the possibility of **developing a landing strip on Charlton Island** as a means to improve access for land users and tourists alike. Participants added the potential to develop complementary infrastructure and services, that could also lead to job creation, for example, it was mentioned that increased flight travel could create an opportunity to train local Crees to become pilots to serve the communities.

### ***Economic Spinoffs for Local Communities***

Many focus group participants agreed that an NMCA presents the potential to **generate significant economic spinoff opportunities for local communities**. Multiple participants mentioned the job creation that an NMCA could ignite. Several participants emphasized that the jobs do not need to be linked to the tourism industry but rather, could be created indirectly through the NMCA (ex. management, monitoring, translation, etc.). Participants also spoke about the possibility of outsourcing certain contracts (ex. catering, transportation, etc.). Other participants spoke about the possibility of **developing a non-extractive economy**, while another mentioned niche tourism

opportunities that could arise, such as **adventure tourism packages and corporate retreats** that an NMCA could help generate.

Many participants spoke to the importance of involving the Cree in these economic opportunities. One participant mentioned that the **CNG could help find entrepreneurs and projects** to benefit the region, while another spoke about preparing certified Cree employees immediately. Another participant identified **Apatisiwin Skills Development** as a potential partner to help ensure that Cree employees are sufficiently trained to help contribute to the local economy.

#### ***Youth (re)Engagement in Their Culture***

Focus group participants largely viewed an NMCA as an opportunity that could help Cree youth rediscover or further discover their culture. Multiple participants put forward the idea of **youth leadership in an NMCA** project. Other participants focused on **educational opportunities** that an NMCA project would provide for youth, both through formal and informal means. Among the formal means, participants suggested **partnerships with universities** for training, while others spoke more generally of the need to develop **internship/mentorship training programs**. Other participants mentioned the creation of **summer camps** as a way to help youth better **understand the land and their own culture**. Among the informal means, participants spoke about the possibility of **taking youth onto the land to help increase their knowledge**, as well as providing youth programs that teach youth to **become guardians of traditional knowledge**.

### **2.3.2 Challenges**

Following the presentations on tourism and economic activities, the following ideas on **NMCA as a challenge** arose in the focus groups:

- **Safety;**
- **Logistics for tourists;**
- **Cultural harm to community;**
- **Environmental harm;**
- **Capacity issues;**
- **Limitation of alternative development opportunities.**

#### ***Safety***

The question of safety for land users in the EMR was one of the main concerns mentioned by focus group participants. The weather and tides, and particularly the unpredictability of these two factors, was discussed as a significant safety issue. Another participant mentioned polar bears as a potential safety issue, while another spoke about the micro-climate created by the dams that can create unsafe fog and currents.

#### ***Logistics for Tourists***

Many participants expressed concerns regarding the logistical challenges that tourists who wish to visit an NMCA would face. Most of these participants mentioned the remoteness of the region as a major issue. For instance, for visitors travelling by road, the destination is far from major population centres, and for those travelling by air, tickets are extremely expensive. Others expressed concerns that the weather could limit tourism, with winter tourism being a particular challenge, while the unpredictable conditions of the bay itself limiting the assurance to be able to carry out marine activities as planned and advertised.

### ***Cultural Harm to Community***

Several community representatives expressed concern about the impact that tourists might have on the EMR. One mentioned that the NMCA could attract **too many tourists** to the region, which could impede locals access to the land. Others expressed concerns that tourist behaviour might **conflict with values**, or that they might disrespect or ignore certain cultural practices.

### ***Environmental Harm***

Participants also expressed concerns regarding the potential environmental harm to the EMR due to an influx of tourist activities. While some worried about the possibility of an **overuse of the land by tourists**, while others spoke about the current lack of data, notably concerning wildlife numbers. It was noted that to better understand the potential future impacts it is necessary to have **baseline data** and then ensure ongoing monitoring by Crees.

### ***Capacity issues***

Community representatives envision capacity issues as a significant potential challenge linked to the establishment of an NMCA. Several expressed concern that there may **not be enough people to cover positions** in administration and operations for the NMCA. Others questioned the **job options that would exist for non-formally educated people**. One participant also wondered if the communities would be prepared to have an increase in tourism and be able to sufficiently manage the anticipated influx of visitors.

### ***Limitation of alternative development opportunities***

Several focus group participants worried that the designation of an NMCA **could close the door to alternative developments for the area**. One mentioned that the **protection status could hinder other economic opportunities**. Others spoke of the development of alternative energy projects, such as wind turbines or offshore energy, as well as telecommunications or fibre optic infrastructure. The concern of these participants was that these activities may not be permitted in an NMCA.

## **2.3.3 Summary and Takeaways**

Based upon the number of comments, the two categories in which participants see the most **important opportunities** regarding Tourism and Economic Activities are **Valorization of Cree Culture and Leadership and Economic Spin-offs for Local Communities**. The categories of **Youth Engagement in their Culture and Infrastructure Development** were also identified as significant opportunities that the Crees could benefit from if an NMCA is created in the EMR.

Most of the **challenges** related to Tourism and Economic Activities were linked to **Safety and Logistics for Tourists**. Some participants also expressed concern that there could be **challenges in the capacity to welcome an increased number of tourists** to the region in the context of an NMCA.

Community members shared several **reflections** regarding Tourism and Economic Activities. While not categorizing it as a challenge or opportunity, several participants questioned how the Crees could ensure that the NMCA would be a **low-impact tourist destination**. Another participant mentioned that being part of the Parks Canada network of protected areas would **increase the region's visibility**. In terms of governance, focus group participants were curious as to the nuances of governance for an NMCA. They questioned how the relationship between Parks Canada and other Indigenous-led NMCAs operate, and to what extent an NMCA in the EMR would be Cree-led as opposed to managed by Parks Canada.

## 3 SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cree representatives who participated in the NMCA Technical Workshop agreed that the idea of designating an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region held a lot of potential benefits for the Cree communities, especially in terms of economic development related to tourism. Cultural promotion, preservation and continuity were highlighted as added-value elements that an NMCA could also support. Below is a synthesis of the key takeaways from the outcomes of the thematic focus group discussions, a summary of transversal themes that arose throughout the dialogue, regardless of the topic being discussed, and recommendations to consider in the preparation and facilitation of the upcoming public consultations in the coastal Cree communities.

### 3.1. KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### 3.1.1 Culture and Heritage

Many of workshop participants agreed that an NMCA could provide opportunities to **valorize Cree culture and heritage**, notably through **Culture Preservation and Land Protection**, and **Cultural Continuity**. Participants named diverse ways of achieving this goal: telling their histories from a Cree perspective, reappropriating, and highlighting Cree place names, focusing on Cree language, sharing stories and legends with visitors, using modern audiovisual tools (YouTube, film, graphic novels) to preserve and share historic knowledge and the Cree language. Based on the outcomes of these discussions, there was a noted interest in the opportunity to **promote traditional knowledge in the context of an NMCA**, not just as a point of leverage for **tourism** offerings, but also for **developing a better understanding and connection to the environment through Cree-led research and monitoring of the environment**.

Although participants view an NMCA as an opportunity to valorize traditional Cree knowledge, their comments indicated a **concern that an NMCA could pose issues regarding the protection of their territory**. Participants spoke to the importance of **protecting sacred places and maintaining the confidentiality of culturally significant sites**, as well as ensuring that an NMCA **does not interfere with traditional cultural activities, namely hunting and fishing**. If an NMCA is established, it must take these concerns into account to adequately **protect traditional knowledge and culturally sensitive areas**. For instance, it was suggested that outfitting and tourism operators should **ensure tour schedules do not interfere with Cree hunting routes**, especially during periods of the year when many Cree land users are out on the land. Valorization includes not only the notion of sharing and promoting traditional knowledge, but also protecting and preserving it as defined and dictated by the Cree communities.

#### 3.1.2 Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology

Many workshop participants agreed that an NMCA presents opportunities for the protecting the wildlife and ecology of the EMR. The participants' comments indicated a significant interest for the NMCA project to include the development of Cree-led monitoring initiatives for the marine region, which would include collecting baseline data on a variety of wildlife in James Bay that hold importance for the Crees and their way of life. Establishing and managing an NMCA in a way that incorporates a monitoring program led by Cree land users, could contribute to an increase in



Western-based scientific knowledge of the protected area. The integration of Cree knowledge with Western scientific knowledge was identified as a key aspect to consider for a future NMCA project.

Workshop participants did not identify many issues when considering the concept of an NMCA as it might relate to Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology. Rather, they focused on the positive impacts related to developing scientific knowledge that an NMCA could generate and the added environmental protection for the region. However, there are environmental conditions, caused by Hydro-Québec dams, that have had a negative environmental impact on the region's ecological health. It was stated that these factors must be considered when planning and conducting future ecological research in the area.

### 3.1.3 Tourism and Economic Activities

The majority of participants perceived the potential establishment of an NMCA in the EMR as a chance to **generate positive economic opportunities for local Cree communities**. The envisioned spin-offs include **job creation (both in tourist-related fields as well as complementary industries)**, increased collaboration with other businesses and communities, and the establishment of niche tourist packages, such as corporate retreats and cultural adventure tours.

Workshop participants also mentioned several **challenges** that should be considered in the NMCA feasibility study. The current **lack of capacity** to be able to adequately respond to an expected influx of tourists that an NMCA could generate was a concern repeated in the focus groups. Additionally, the anticipated economic opportunities could be tempered by the fact that the **James Bay region remains a difficult to access and inaccessible to those without substantial financial means**. It was noted that the **logistical challenges related to transport of people and materials** needs to be tackled in the economic development strategy for the NMCA to be an economic gain for the Cree communities.

### 3.1.4 Summary of Key Takeaways

During the workshop discussions, several common key ideas emerged within each focus group. Regardless of the theme of the discussion, participants expressed interest and optimism of how an NMCA could be used as a context and a mechanism to help **engage Cree youth** in their learning their cultural traditions and reconnecting with the land. Comments and ideas related to **Cree culture and the environment** were frequently raised as **both opportunities and challenges** for the feasibility of an NMCA in the EMR. The excitement surrounding the potential benefits of an NMCA was also consistently tempered by comments about the **limited local capacity**. As discussed below, these recurring, transversal topics should be addressed during the upcoming consultations within the Cree communities.

## 3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT PHASES

The participants in the NMCA Technical Workshop represented a cross-section of the various Cree community interests and other stakeholders who would be involved in the creation and management of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region. To reiterate, the purpose of the workshop session was to establish a baseline understanding of the main interests and concerns that the concept of an NMCA raises for the Cree communities so that these issues can be addressed more pointedly during the upcoming community public consultation sessions. This section presents the main issues that arose during the focus group discussions that merit further reflection, debate, and discussion within each community.

To synthesize, during the focus group discussions, regardless of the topic at hand, the **opportunities** that participants repeatedly mentioned were the following:

- **economic development**, mostly tourism-based (outfitters, guides, etc.), plus complementary industries, such as transport logistics and local goods and services (artworks, restaurants, lodging);
- **potential to promote and valorise Cree culture**, both in relation to tourism and economic development as well as within the Cree communities;
- **catalyst to develop programs and opportunities for Cree youth to reconnect with their territory and culture while developing life skills and opening doors for future career development.**

Although there was much expressed excitement of what an NMCA could bring to the communities in positive respects, participants also raised **significant concerns** and **challenges** including the following:

- **lack of local capacity to effectively manage an NMCA** (issues related to inadequate infrastructure, logistics due to the remoteness of the location, and limited human resources);
- **environmental damage due to overuse** (consequence of increased tourism); and
- **threats to cultural security** (conflicts between tourist operations and Cree land users).

Future public consultations to discuss the NMCA within the Cree communities present an opportunity to **address these issues in greater depth and detail and explore potential solutions that would work in the interest of the Crees** within each community as well as for the Eeyou Marine Region.

To ensure a participation from various groups, **including elders and youth**, it is recommended to design the activities in a way that engages these targeted groups. For instance, separate sessions designed to encourage youth to express their thoughts and ideas about the NMCA proposal could serve as an effective educational and engagement tool. Not only would this allow for **Cree youth to learn more about NMCAs and marine ecosystems**, but it could **inspire an inter-generational conversation** about their territory, stories, and aspirations for themselves and their communities with the NMCA serving as a context.

As an integral component of the NMCA Feasibility Study, the public consultations serve as an essential tool to assess whether the NMCA would be in the best interest of the Crees or not. Therefore, it is important that they be **conducted in an open and transparent manner** whereby the inspirational aspects of the NMCA proposal are tempered with an honest presentation and consideration of the challenges an NMCA in Eeyou Istchee could present for the Cree communities. This includes the question of how to **equitably distribute the economic benefits** (investments for infrastructure development; training programs; etc.) between the communities as well as addressing the **potential conflicts between Cree land users and tourists** in the scenario that an NMCA becomes an attractive tourist destination for non-Crees. Discussion on how best to leverage sustainable financial support to serve the needs of the community, including development of **Cree businesses; cultural-based programs for Cree youth; and Cree-led ecological monitoring and research projects.**

In conclusion, the outcomes from the NMCA Technical Workshop present many perceived opportunities and positive responses to the idea of moving ahead with the NMCA proposal. The task for the next phase of public consultations is **to reflect on the challenges and assess whether the CNG and Parks Canada can find specific solutions so that the NMCA serves the various interests (cultural, ecological, economic) while ensuring continued Cree presence, monitoring, stewardship, and governance in the Eeyou Marine Region.**

# ANNEX

## AGENDA

**National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA)  
Technical Workshop**  
October 25-26, 2023  
Le Centre Sheraton, Room Joyce, Montréal

**Purpose of the workshop:**

To bring representatives from coastal Cree First Nations, Cree Nation Government (CNG), Parks Canada (PC), Cree entities, Eeyou Marine Region (EMR) Institutions of Public Government (IPGs), and researchers together to discuss, exchange, and brainstorm some of the key themes of importance for the development of an NMCA concept and vision.

**DAY 1** (9am to 4:00 pm)

1. Welcome and workshop overview (C. Beck & C. Otter Tetrault)
2. Participant introductions
3. NMCA project background & context
  - 3.a) Tawich (marine) conservation area project presentation (C. Scott, M. Mulrennan, V. Bussieres)
  - 3.b) National Marine Conservation Areas: A Tool for Marine Conservation and Cultural Continuation in Eeyou Istchee (C. Ouimet)
  - 3.c) The NMCA feasibility assessment for the Eeyou Marine Region (C. Beck)
  - 3.d) The NMCA in the context of the Eeyou Marine Land Claims Agreement (Gowling WLG)

*Lunch (provided)*

4. Cultural Theme
  - 4.a) Conserving and Telling the Story of Canada and its Peoples: Parks Canada Cultural Heritage, Designation, Interpretation and Promotion (V. Michel)
  - 4.b) Cultural criteria to support the establishment and management of an NMCA (J. Bishop)
  - 4.c) Roundtable discussion/ workshop activities on Cree cultural priorities in relation to NMCA establishment, management (BC2 facilitation support)

**DAY 2** (9:00 am to 4:00 pm)

5. Ecological Theme

- 5.a) Ecological Knowledge in National Marine Conservation Area Establishment and Management (R. Eagleson)
- 5.b) Eeyou Coastal Habitat Comprehensive Research Project (M. Leblanc)
- 5.c) Roundtable discussion/workshop activities of Wildlife, Habitat and Ecologys highly valued by Crees in relation to NMCA establishment & management (BC2 facilitation support)

*Lunch (provided) & Viewing of Cape Hope Islands based video "Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story"*

6. Sustainable Economy Theme

- 6.a) Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Activities in national Marine Conservation Areas (D. Blanchard)
- 6.b) Cree tourism opportunities (R. McGinley)
- 6.c) Roundtable discussion/workshop activities on sustainable economic opportunities (BC2 facilitation support)

7. Next steps for coastal Cree community NMCA engagement (C. Beck)

8. Other items



Parks  
Canada

Parcs  
Canada

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Wayne Cheezo	Cree Nation of Waskaganish
Howard McDonald	Cree Nation of Wemindji
Johnny Mark	Cree Nation of Wemindji
Shirlene Mistacheesick	Cree Nation of Wemindji
Sheree House	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Daniel Pachano	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Anderson Jolly	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
James Bobbish	Cree Nation of Chisasibi/EMRPC
Robin McGinley	Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association
Thomas Stevens	Cree Trappers Association
Melanie Leblanc	Niskamoon Corporation
John Bishop	Cree Nation Government
Lucas Delvechio	Cree Nation Government
Joshua Blacksmith	Cree Nation Government
Maya Longpre Croteau	Cree Nation Government
Chantal Otter Tetreault	Cree Nation Government
Christopher Beck	Cree Nation Government
Rosanna Wisden	Cree Nation Government/Eeyou Planning Commission
Chantal Ouimet	Parks Canada
Diane Blanchard	Parks Canada
Ryan Eagleson	Parks Canada
Virginie Michel	Parks Canada
James O'Leary	Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission
Joyce Tshiyoyo	Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission
Félix Boulanger	Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board
Colin Scott	Wemindji-McGill Protected Areas Project
Véronique Bussières	Wemindji-McGill Protected Areas Project
Angéline Therrien-Lapointe	Gowling WLG

## **WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS**

The digital files of the NMCA Technical Workshop presentations can be accessed on the Cree Nation Government website: [eeyouconservation.ca](http://eeyouconservation.ca)

### **Feasibility, Governance, and Legal**

*The Tawich (Marine) Conservation Area Project* (C. Scott, V. Bussi eres)

*National Marine Conservation Areas: A Tool for Marine Conservation and Cultural Continuation in Eeyou Istchee* (C. Ouimet)

*National Marine Conservation Area: Feasibility Assessment Project* (C. Beck)

*Establishing an NMCA in the Context of the EMR Agreement* (A. Therrien-Lapointe )

### **Culture and Heritage**

*Conserving and Telling the Story of Canada and Indigenous Peoples: Parks Canada Cultural Heritage, Designation, Interpretation and Promotion* (V. Michel)

*Cultural Criteria to Support the Establishment and Management of a National Marine Conservation Area* (J. Bishop)

### **Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology**

*Ecological Knowledge in National Marine Conservation Area Establishment and Management* (R. Eagleson)

*Eeyou Coastal Habitat Comprehensive Research Project* (M. Leblanc)

### **Tourism and Economic Activities**

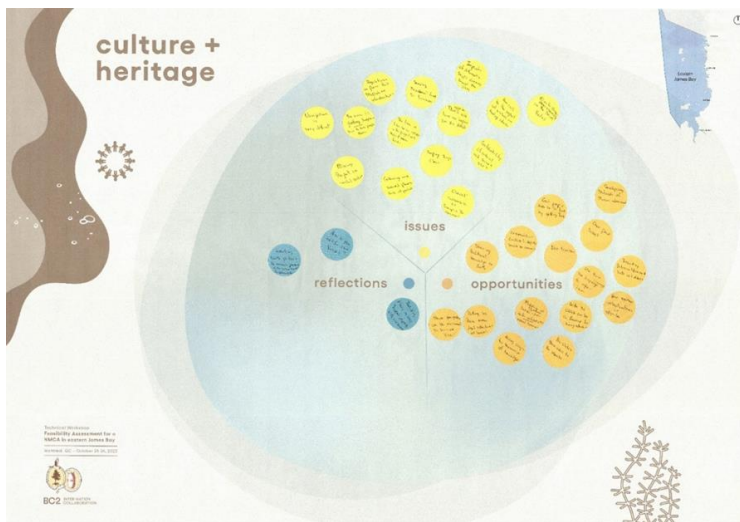
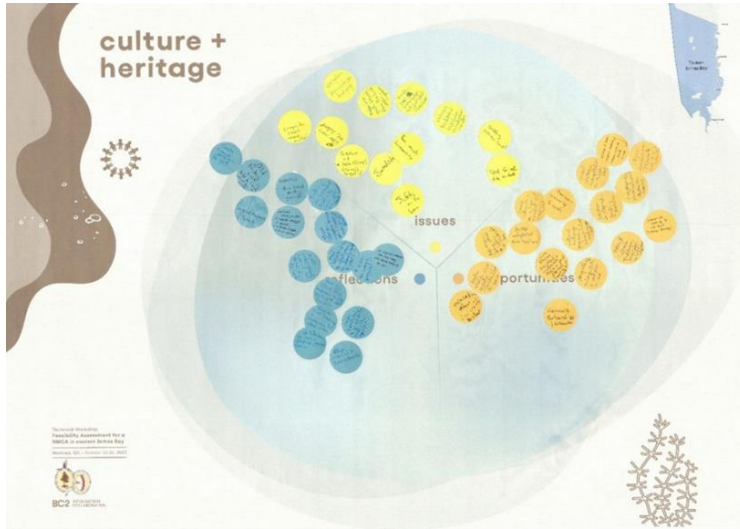
*Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Activities in National Marine Conservation Areas* (D. Blanchard)

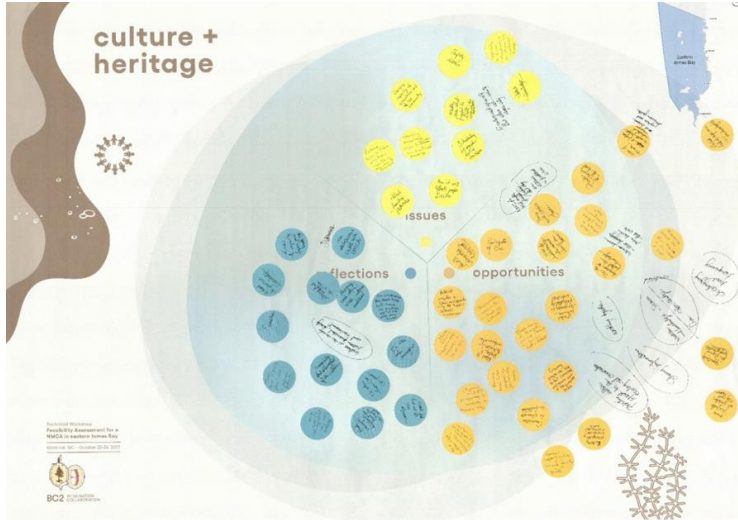
*Cree Tourism Opportunities* (R. McGinley)

# FOCUS GROUP DATA COLLECTION AND SYNTHESIS

## Culture and Heritage

### Data Collection Posters with Notes





**Data Synthesis Tables**

**Opportunities**

Culture preservation and land protection	Culture transfer	Education of the youth	Governance	Economic benefits and opportunities	Exchange in Western and traditional knowledge
History from the Cree perspective	Tours that highlight place names + legends (normally told in the winter)	Use it as a classroom for ecology, biology, and culture	Membership. How bureaucracy created by CNG could pair with NMCA	Leverage hiring process	Get to know each others' views, Indigenous and Western
Institutionalize the names and use them	A way to show hospitality	Accessible format (as part of a language strategy) to educate	Putting some legal restrictions or zoning`	Economic development (guide tourist)	Equal voices, Cree, Parks Canada, Trust, Transparency, decolonization
Promote language by activities	Pride in showing their land	Need infrastructure to allow community to share knowledge to youth (ex: access to cams)	Protecting culture speak to the ecological	Including professional (archaeologists) young and elders	Sharing information
Use of canoe	Sharing knowledge helps strengthen our cultural knowledge	Create materials in Cree aimed at youth (graphic novels)	Working with partners to increase protection of the surroundings next the protected area	Eco tourism (2)	Combine cultural knowledge to Western knowledge/science
Shipwrecks under the water	Share perspective on	Language learning		Promoting the job of captains and	Building transparency and



	environment to tourists			trust in protected areas
National heritage site	NMCA creates an opportunity to support cultural transmission	Fund material to help teach the youth about the area	Tourist guides (through videos)	Working together
Focus on Cree language and their experience of the land and the water	Sharing with visitors Cree stories, underwater dogs, spirit places, etc.	Create opportunities to go out on the land (ex: Gap year?)	Develop Indigenous eco tourism	Assign research to Cree interests
Reappropriate place names	Developing internationally material for stories	Cultural exchange: Inland, urban., visiting the coast	Tourism=community growth	
Restore wildlife areas (ex: protect Charlton Island for geese)	A tool to preserve knowledge. A tool for sharing the culture and transfer it not only to non-Indigenous but also to the Indigenous youth.	Intergeneration exchange. Youth access to land.	Upgrade of infrastructure	
Also recognizing history of the Cree – Inuit allow sharing history of the EMR	Tours with stories	Sharing traditional knowledge to the youth	Facilitate access to islands.	
Education about the rights of Cree to the islands	Share stories – inspire tourism. Maybe movies Giant beaver	Building camps for knowledge transfer	Opportunity to test cutting edge technology such as electrical boats and vehicles	
Field=lab to experience new technologies	Create audiovisual material-tell stories of the land	Career opportunities and summer programs for the youth	Upgrade marine infrastructures	
The NMCA will make people realise that they are entering a protected area	Interviews in Cree – YouTube; graphic novels.		Capacity to build infrastructure = promote Cree culture	
Conservation is already a protection	Bring stories to life (ex. Underdog water)			
Return cultivate traditions (ex. Build wigwams)	Correct history interpretation (ex. Hudson Bay)			
Consolidate link to land by getting people there	Indigenous guardianships, tallyman, sharing knowledge			

Glossary of terms with consistent terminology in Cree (collective across the coast)	Including elders in any project especially with Cree names
Use Cree language to explain values	Mapping of cultural sacred sites with confidentiality (cultural transmission)

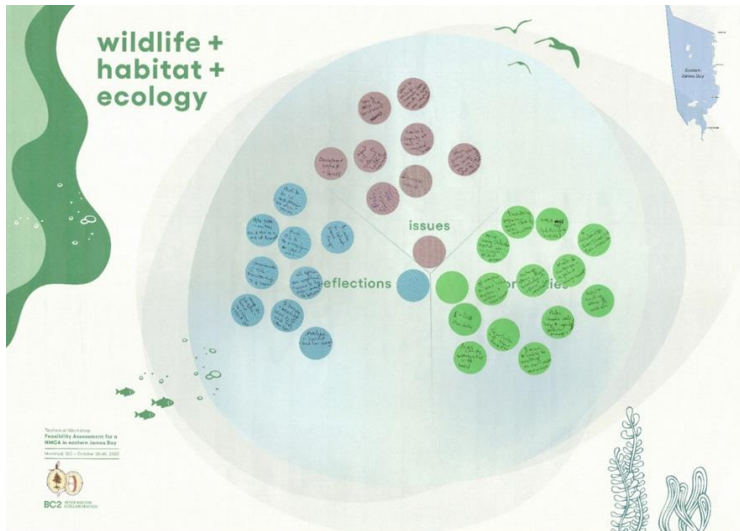
## Challenges

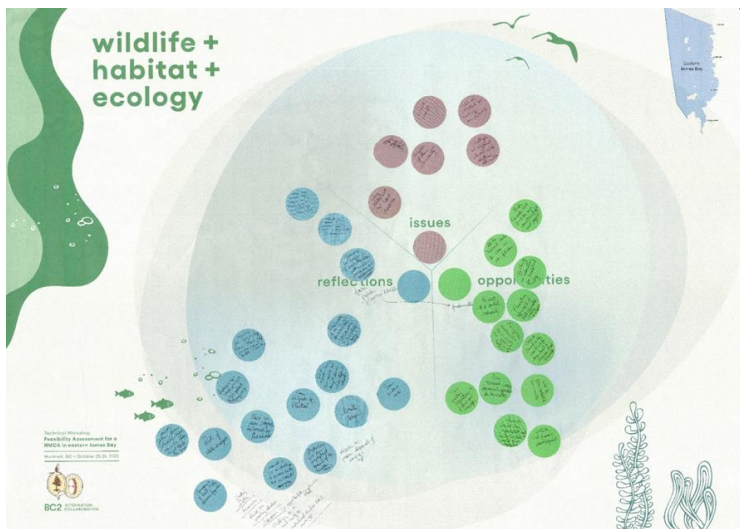
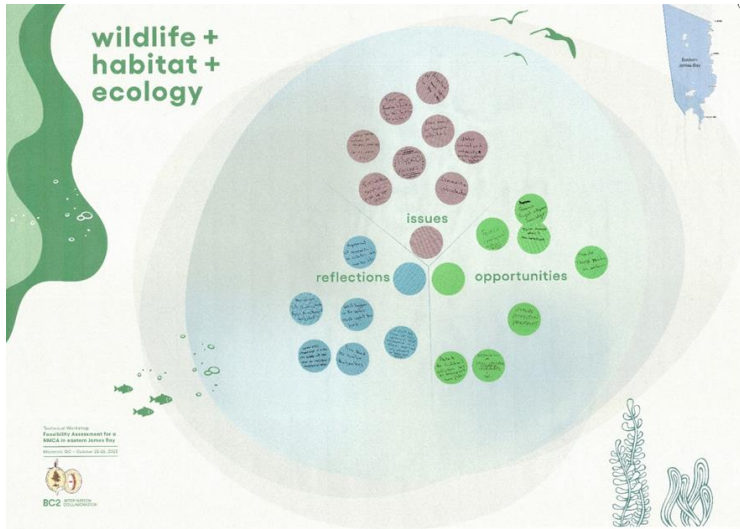
Capacity	Governance	Cultural practices	Risk of dis-appropriation	Protection of the territory	Logistics and safety
Know the capacity and not exceed it before making regulations. Regulations must be adapted.	Determine the status of non-Indigenous with the NMCA	Bad example with non-Indigenous in the community: caribou hunt that went really bad	Ensuring people are able to feel connected and remain part of the protected area	Ensure visits leave no trace and protect fauna and flora	Navigation. Discussion on dredging (clear the bed of (a harbour, river, or other area of water) by scooping out mud, weeds, and rubbish with a dredge)
Considering capacity of ecosystems and of the communities	Who owns the Islands	The conservation plan needs to build around Cree practices and not the other way around	The time it takes to appropriate the project and make it more local	Camps: Increase traffic?	Safety issues Safety
Serving traditional food for tourists (time of preparation, resources?)	Jurisdiction	Tools scheduled in balance with traditional seasons (hunting)	Valorise traditional knowledge (fear of losing it) example Indigenous guardian	Protection of geese flyaway (ground for goselings)	Navigation is very difficult
	Regulation in place for MAPAQ or infrastructure	Affect hunting patterns	No other companies. Only Cree companies	Need for better data on depth	The area is getting dangerous. Hard to take people there
	Time for developing an overall consensus	How it will affect people's activities	Make sure the youth benefit from the land/water experience	Identify restitution zones	
		Scheduling hunting, research, tourism	Be the sole managers	Mining project in coastal water	
		Make sure the project is built around the activities	Ensure local Cree companies provide the tours	Gathering in sacred place	
		Prioritize bush knowledge over (not just) book knowledge		Keeping things clean	
		Impact hunting territory		Upgrade dams will have an	

		impact on the NMCA
Too much bureaucracy	Impact of visitors on hunting activities	Impact of different ships coming through the area (what impact?)
		Confidentiality of cultural and sacred places
		Climate change – Dams – travel routes

## Wildlife, Habitat, and Ecology

Data Collection Posters with Notes





**Data Synthesis Tables**

**Opportunities**

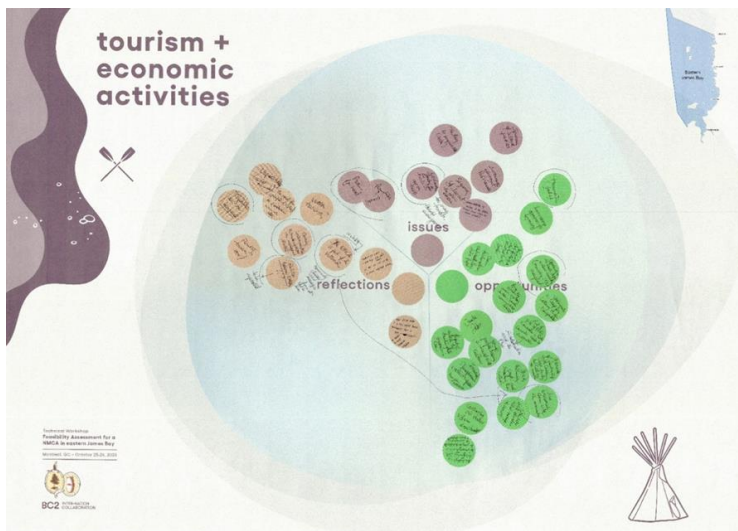
<b>Improve monitoring</b>	<b>Management and supervision of research activities</b>	<b>Protection and preservation of the environment</b>	<b>Consolidation of cultural knowledge</b>	<b>Increase collaboration between different actors</b>	<b>Benefits for local population</b>
<b>Increase monitoring program, assess state of site, indicators</b>	All the research should be done in one place	NMCA add protection zone (wildlife)	Confirm place names	Get everyone on the same radio system	Results of research and data could be on shared database
<b>Monitor existing stock of wildlife</b>	Permits that control research	Benefit for ecotourism - ex. Protect beluga nurseries	Exchange stories, share knowledge - inform conservation	Increase collaboration between Parks Canada and Cree communities	Tourism development, chance for cultural and wildlife development
<b>Increase access to funding for monitoring ex. Environment Canada researchers</b>	Not to over-solicit community	NMCA clarifies the reasons to stop hunting.	Opportunity for education in traditional way	Parks Canada collaborative with local	Parks Canada could help increase capacity locally (example: managers employment)
<b>e-DNA monitoring</b>	More research, more research opportunities for the water	NMCA will prevent development	Preserve traditional knowledge	Bring many stakeholders together – fed., eco minister, political players	Education - opportunity to be upheld in local schools
<b>Climate change monitoring; ice monitoring</b>	Research could be regulated	Wildlife protection programs	Research project on Indigenous knowledge	Parks Canada to find the best structure, project, and support	
<b>Need to do ice monitoring – use other sources</b>	Precautionary approach of Parks Canada in data analysis	Protect the traditional activities such as fishing and berry picking	Baseline information/update?	Use existing regulations to protect and manage	
<b>Gathering Data</b>		Place we can integrate eelgrass by Parks Canada	Expansion of Indigenous-run research institutes	Push Hydro-Québec to diversify wind + solar	
<b>Engagement of communities in collecting and monitoring data</b>			Building on existing studies	Communicate with Hydro-Québec – ecological transition to decrease impact	
				Communicating to the community on what the NMCA is about	
				Communicating (transparency) in relationship-building with Inuit about the establishment and management of NMCA	

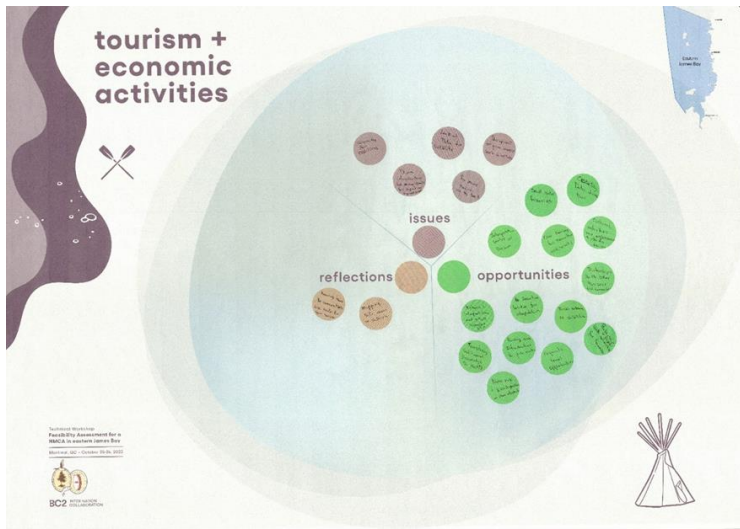
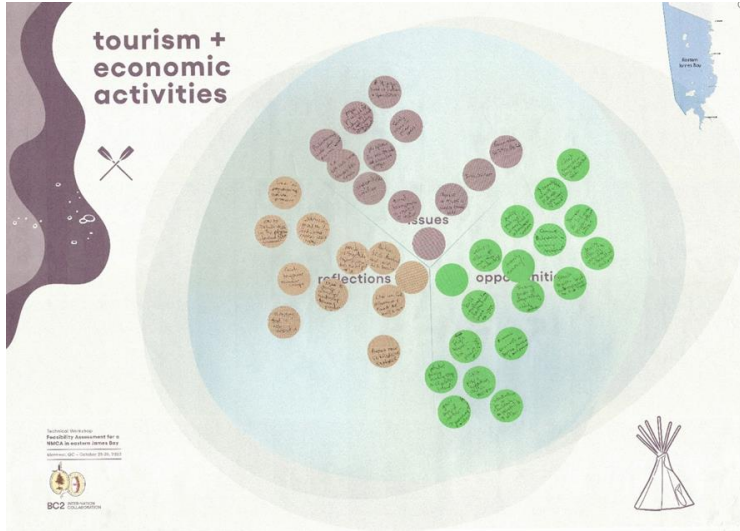
## Challenges

Hydro-Québec	Governance challenges	Negative impact of NMCA on traditional cultural activities	Environmental damages or risks	Logistical challenges to adequately implement an NMCA
<b>Hydro-Québec's role</b>	Define jurisdictions Cree coastal; prov. vs. fed., what to exclude from NMCA	Loss of respect for hunting traditions	Invasive species	Exclusion of shipping channels from NMCA
<b>Impact of Hydro-Québec on ecological health of marine area</b>	Challenge of different levels with different communities	Perception of the community (of the NMCA plan)	Development impact – geese	Limited capacity at local and regional levels
<b>Impact of the dams on hunting</b>	Jurisdiction system could be an issue	Issue on hunting activities due to tourism or visitors	Climate change (mentioned three times)	Community infrastructure
<b>HYDRO-QUÉBEC</b>	Knowledgeable people who do not share their knowledge		Water current and instability creates problem for hunting activities	
<b>Other future methods of energy harvest (wind, wave, etc.)</b>			Integration of new species in the area	

## Tourism and Economic Activities

### Data Collection Posters with Notes





**Data Synthesis Tables**

**Opportunities**

<b>Valorization of Cree culture and Cree-led Initiatives</b>	<b>Promoting the region to a wider audience</b>	<b>Infrastructure development</b>	<b>Economic spinoffs for local communities</b>	<b>Youth (re)engagement in their culture</b>
<b>Wellness offer – get away from technology</b>	Promote tourism based on experience of the land	Build complementary infrastructure/service	Economic spin-offs for services providers and good producers	Increase capacity/education of youth knowledge of land
<b>Develop packages – diversified – adventure seekers</b>	Grow/expand clientele – increase awareness of existence of James Bay	Flight travel – heli + planes local pilots	Translation jobs	Young people leading (? a trad...? Culture
<b>Collect mussels – local traditional foods</b>	Bring community main visitor centres, small communities liaison	Potentially develop landing strip on Charlton Island	Possibility of contracts outsourcing	Youth relearning their cultures
<b>Tourism for Indigenous people between Nations</b>	Bird watching or wildlife	Infrastructure development on Charlton Island – potential to increase offer	Opportunities to create jobs without tourists (monitoring, etc, management)	Transferring traditional knowledge to youth
<b>Develop offering to promote intercultural exchange</b>		Create technologies, electrical cars... test a project	Working with a coop for catering or for transportation	Partnership or program with universities for training
<b>Training guides in storytelling – added value</b>		Infrastructure for jobs creation	Some of the job for the...who are created to the bush	How to include youth in the programs – become the future guardians
<b>CNG playing a supporting role in tourism</b>			Create jobs	Create temporary summer camps
<b>Translations</b>			Financial management visitors experience human resource	Need to develop internship/mentorship training programs
<b>Part of site of Parks Canada in collaboration with the Cree</b>			Small-scale fisheries	
<b>Environmental assessment done with the communities</b>			Partnerships with other business and communities	
<b>Cree who will decide what message to convey</b>			Funding for jobs creation	
<b>Respect of culture by translating all brochures in Cree</b>			Corporate travel opportunities	
<b>Elders to share knowledge</b>			Economy that is non-extractive	
<b>Archaeological and historical site, for people to visit and for people to volunteer to uncover new artifacts</b>			Apatisiwin skills development could assist with training	
<b>Cultural activities and experiences to offer to tourism</b>			CNG can find entrepreneurs and projects that benefit the region	
<b>Cree knowledge for navigation and security</b>			Prepare now certified Cree employees	



Interpretation centre or person
Historical interpretation and rebuilt historical site
Innovative solution for interpretation
Econo muse (?) + NMCA pavilion or other infrastructure
Cree-led programming
Provide unforgettable experiences – discomfort part of it
Partnerships across James Bay (with ON NMCA) so that we can provide a more regional scope

## Challenges

Safety	Logistics for tourists	Cultural harm to community	Environmental harm	Capacity issues	Limitation of alternative development opportunities
Safety issues – polar bears	Transportation logistics (by land)	Tourist behaviour in conflict with values	Environmental assessment Parks Canada	Job options for non-formally educated people	IE offshore energy, telecom, fibre, optics
Unpredictable weather (2)	Infrastructure	Ignorance of cultural practices	Too much tourism on the land	People penalised for making too much money – finding workers difficult	Protection may hinder other economic opportunities
The Bay is unpredictable (tide)	Access = Traffic. NMCA could help	Too many tourists	Lack of data for wildlife	Number of people needed in admin and operations	Development of green energies such as wind turbine
Dams infrastructure an micro climate has impact on fog and currents (?)	Unpredictability of weather in the offshore (maybe small window for marine activities)			Capacity for positions	
	Remoteness (expensive)			Knowing how the communities are ready to have tourism	
	Price for travel				

## REFERENCES

- Parks Canada. (2023a, October 6). *Feasibility assessment for a proposed national marine conservation area in Eeyou Istchee (in Eastern James Bay)*. <https://parks.canada.ca/amnc-nmca/cnamnc-cnmca/jamesest-easternjames>
- Parks Canada. (2023b, October 19). *Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area*. <https://parks.canada.ca/amnc-nmca/cnamnc-cnmca/tallurutiup-imanga>
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# **NMCA INFORMATION SESSIONS REPORT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document presents a summary of the outcomes of the public Information Sessions, carried out on February 19-22, 2024 in the Cree communities along the eastern James Bay coastline of Eeyou Istchee. These information sessions designed to initiate a region-wide community reflection and dialogue about the potential establishment of a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in the offshore waters of the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR), including the interest for a coastal waters project in collaboration with Québec and the potential impacts these proposals could have on Cree communities in the region.

The Information Sessions contribute to the Feasibility Study currently being undertaken joined by the Cree Nation Government (CNG) and Parks Canada. The purpose of the Feasibility Study is to assess support for an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region and determine under which conditions the project is feasible. The assessment includes steps and activities to identify the potential added value and impacts, to collect community feedback regarding perceived opportunities and risks, and to determine whether the establishment of an NMCA, in collaboration with Parks Canada, would align with Cree values and support the interests and needs of the Cree communities situated along the eastern coast of James Bay.

The Information Sessions were organized by the CNG, in collaboration with Parks Canada and Le Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs of Québec (MELCCFP), and the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (EMPRC), with technical support from BC2 Inter-Nation Collaboration.

This report summarizes the objectives, methods, activities, and outcomes of the Information Sessions. It also presents an overview of the content covered in the presentations.

The **main takeaways** of the Information Sessions are as follows:

- Shared concern among the Cree communities for the health of habitats/ecosystems, specifically related to the impact it has on the Cree way of life.
- Notable confusion about the concept and limits of the NMCA and coastal waters project, especially in relation to other conservation initiatives in the region.
- Emphasis of the need for the process to be transparent and Cree-led.
- Interest and need to better understand the implications of an NMCA on the Cree way of life; communities require more concrete examples and explanations of governance scenarios.

A brief conclusion includes recommendations regarding specific issues to address in the upcoming public engagement sessions and next steps for planning and mobilizing participation. The consultations will be an opportunity to gather information and perspectives from each community, which will inform the CNG on whether to move forward with Parks Canada in negotiations to establish an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region.

Lastly, the *Annex* provides complementary information, including the maps presented during the information sessions.

# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT

The NMCA Information Sessions are one of several events and essential steps in the NMCA Feasibility Assessment to obtain input from coastal Cree communities on the proposed NMCA in the EMR. The first event in October 2023, in Montréal, was the NMCA Technical Workshop<sup>1</sup>, wherein representatives from the coastal Cree communities of Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi, were invited to discuss, exchange, and brainstorm ideas concerning the NMCA concept. Representatives of regional stakeholders, such as the Cree Trappers Association, Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association, the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (EMRPC), and the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board (EMRWB), were also invited to participate in the workshop. Researchers who have conducted research projects within the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR) were solicited to present their work and findings to the group to help inform and frame the discussion around specific themes.

Based on the outcomes of focus group discussions during the technical workshop, the CNG and Parks Canada agreed that effective community engagement and consultation would require Information Sessions to ensure that community members are well-informed and have time to reflect on the concept of an NMCA.

The information sessions were planned to cover the whole marine area, offshore and coastal waters, south of the mouth of La Grande River. Effective marine conservation needs to consider protection in both offshore and coastal ecosystems. As the proposed NMCA only addresses marine conservation in the offshore waters, the Québec Government, through the Ministère de l'environnement, de la lutte contre les changements climatiques de la faune et des parcs (MELCCFP), was invited to present their plan for marine conservation in the coastal waters of Eastern James Bay. The EMRPC was also invited to participate in the information sessions, in order to align the proposal for the NMCA with the land use planning process for the EMR.

This report starts with an executive summary. It is followed by an introduction, and two main sections. In the introduction, the context, objective, and organization of the Information Sessions are presented. In Section 1, a summary of the Information Sessions is presented, including the outcomes from each of the coastal Cree communities. Section 2 of the report contains the recommendations and conclusion. The Annex provides complementary information from the Information Sessions.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE INFORMATION SESSIONS

The purpose of the Information Sessions was to inform community members of the four coastal Cree First Nations that are adjacent to the NMCA study area (Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi) about the proposal to establish an NMCA, to present the concurrent conservation efforts, to gauge the interest for the potential of a coastal waters project in collaboration with Québec, to receive initial feedback, and to answer questions. The outcomes of the sessions were to serve as the foundation to develop workshop questions and activities for upcoming engagement sessions within each coastal Cree community. These upcoming sessions aimed to discuss and explore whether an NMCA in the EMR would serve the interests and aspirations of the Cree communities, and if so, provide suggestions for the terms and conditions for the feasibility study.

While the Information Sessions took place in February 2024 in the four coastal communities mentioned above, an additional session took place in Whapmagoostui in June 2024.

## **Limitations**

During the discussion period, in many cases, community members asked questions and discussed issues at length in Cree. A translator then provided a summary of the issues and discussions in English. Given that the facilitators designated to take notes of the discussions do not understand Cree, they were not able to note all the comments from community members. Some of the details and nuances from certain discussions were therefore not recorded and may not be reflected in this report. Additionally, fewer women and youth participated in the Information Sessions, in relation with the participation of middle aged and older male community members in the sessions.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE INFORMATION SESSIONS**

Prior to the Community Information Sessions, the CNG presented on the NMCA feasibility assessment project to the concerned Cree governments at both the regional and local levels. This included the Board/Council of the CNG/Grand Council of the Crees (E.I.), as well as to all of the coastal Cree First Nation Councils. This political engagement was done to ensure that the elected leaders were aware of the project and the approach being taken to engage with the Cree communities, and to provide them with an opportunity to provide their comments and input. The CNG also met with the five coastal Chiefs (Coastal Chiefs Forum) to get their input and guidance on the timing, approach, and methods to be used for the community information sessions.

The CNG was responsible for organizing the Information Sessions and mobilizing participation, ensuring key stakeholders within each community were invited to participate. The key factor was working in close collaboration with coastal community representatives, who played an essential role in advising and working collaboratively on the arrangements for finding the event venues, catering, radio announcements, social media communications, putting up hardcopy poster ads in key places, and arranging ground transportation, among other things. The support of the community reps was crucial in the successful implementation of the Information Sessions.

The representatives from the CNG coordinated and managed communications between representatives from Parks Canada, the MELCCFP, the EMRPC, and BC2 throughout the planning process. The content for the presentation material and formats were also developed collaboratively between the CNG, Parks Canada, the MELCCFP, and the EMRPC. The BC2 Inter-Nations team supported the strategic planning and preparation of visual and communication materials for the sessions in each community.

A list of the representatives from the coastal Cree First Nations and the key stakeholder and government entities who collaborated in the planning, coordination, and implementation of the Information Sessions in the coastal Cree communities can be found in *Annex A*.

# 1 INFORMATION SESSIONS SUMMARY

## 1.1 OVERVIEW

In each of the coastal Cree communities, the information session was presented as an Open House gathering. The meeting space was set up with a projector screen and chairs arranged to optimize the view of the screen and speaker. Several maps depicting the region and specifically, the NMCA study area, were hung on the walls around the gathering space. The maps were used as a tool to incite conversation and share geo-specific information with community members. Brochures in both Cree and English were distributed, summarizing the content that was presented during the information session. Snacks were provided, and door prizes were raffled at the end of the sessions.

Each information session began with an opening prayer, followed by opening remarks by the Deputy Grand Chief Norman A. Wapachee. The information session centred on the presentation given by the representatives of the key entities involved in this NMCA feasibility study (Cree Nation Government, Parks Canada, the EMRPC and the MELCCFP). The presentation featured a live Cree translation and was followed by a question-and-answer period which was moderated by the Deputy Grand Chief. The Cree-English interpreter was also present to translate questions and discussions between presenters and community members.

In a collaborative effort, each representative presented their portion of the slideshow and was available to answer questions from the audience. The intention of the presentation was to introduce community members to the NMCA concept and present Parks Canada's approach when working with Indigenous communities to create and manage NMCAs across Canada. In addition, the CNG, Parks Canada and the MELCCFP wanted to explain their interest to protect coastal waters as well. The representative from the EMRPC also explained their role in conservation and land use planning initiatives in the EMR.

Jurisdiction and governance in the offshore were important topics addressed during the presentation. This included inquiries about how marine protected areas would conform to and support existing treaties and agreements that the Cree Nation has in place with various government entities (e.g., The Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement (EMRLCA) and the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA)). Discussion on possible terms and conditions for potentially establishing an NMCA were also mentioned.

Below is a summary of the content presented to community members. For those interested, the information session presentation will be made available on the Cree Nation Government's Eeyou Conservation website ([eeyouconservation.ca](http://eeyouconservation.ca)).

## 1.2 PRESENTATION: MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN EYYOU ISTCHEE

Each information session began with an opening prayer led by a community member, followed by opening remarks by the Deputy Grand Chief Norman A. Wapachee. The CNG representative then said a word of welcome to the community members and introduced the session. The presentation began with a statement of the objectives for the information session and an outline of the information that would be shared during the presentation.



A few snapshots from the presentation, including a map indicating the various overlapping jurisdictions and collaborative partnerships between the CNG and other government entities can be found in *Annex B* in this report. The content for the rest of the presentation is summarized below, with the structure following the order in which it was presented to community members.

## **Cree Conservation Strategy and Vision**

Deputy Grand Chief Wapachee initiated the session by presenting Parks Canada as CNG's partner in the NMCA project, and the collaborators: Government of Québec (MECCLFP) and the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (EMRPC). He then introduced the project and presented the objectives of the information session.

The CNG representative (Christopher Beck/Chantal Tetreault) provided an overview of the existing agreements, policies, and conservation initiatives at play in Eeyou Istchee (terrestrial and marine). It was immediately specified that given the JBNQA (1975) and EMRLCA (2012), that Cree rights and traditional activities can continue throughout the protected areas.

An overview of the history of protected areas in Eeyou Istchee was also presented. The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy (2014) is an integral aspect of the conversation efforts in the region as it set in motion the creation of a vast network of protected lands across Eeyou Istchee (approx. 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>).

## **Working Together on Marine Protected Areas**

Subsequently, the Parks Canada representative explained their roles and responsibilities if an NMCA is established in James Bay. They also presented the rules and regulations of marine protected areas as set by the Canadian Government.

The MECCLFP representative also presented the target of protected and conserved marine areas for 2030, as well as the potential collaboration between the CNG and Québec to protect the coastal waters along James Bay.

## **Marine Protected Areas initiatives in James Bay**

The MECCLFP's presentation was followed by the EMRPC Director's explanation of the role of the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (EMRPC) in the Eeyou Marine Region. He presented the distinction between the NMCA and the EMRPC mandate. It was explained that the EMRPC has a land use planning process that will determine (based on Cree community input) the land uses for the Cree-owned islands within the NMCA feasibility study. The land use planning process is a separate process from the NMCA Feasibility Study. However, it was explained that the intention is to work on both processes at the same time, in order in order to harmonize the planning so it works as a whole. The vision is to create an interconnected network of protected lands and waters in this part of Eeyou Istchee.

## **Next Steps and Timeline**

The CNG representative concluded with a timeline for the NMCA feasibility study. The following information was provided: the Crees will have to decide on whether an NMCA can proceed and lead to a formal

agreement. He also mentioned that the establishment of an NMCA would first require defined NMCA boundaries through negotiations, and then the process may take a year or more to finalize the establishment of the NMCA. The regulations would be co-developed with the Crees based on principles to sustain ecosystems and the Cree way of life. It was also shown that the timeline for the coastal waters project will be different, as the tripartite committee was created recently and many things need to be discussed and agreed upon before moving forward with the establishment stage.

The presentation was followed by a period of questions and answers detailed in the following section.

### 1.3 COASTAL CREE COMMUNITIES

Below is a summary of the discussions that followed the presentation, organized by the community in the chronological order in which the Information Sessions took place. Within each community, opportunities and concerns were discussed. The synthesis of the discussions is presented below. However, due to the limitations in translation services, the exchanges that occurred in Cree were not fully recorded. It was also noted that women and youth were less present at the Information Sessions. Therefore, the comments below reflect the interests and opinions of a specific demographic in the community, namely older men and/or tallymen.

#### Wemindji

The Open House information session in Wemindji took place on February 19, 2024. Approximately 25 community members attended, most of whom were tallymen and land users. The evening of this event coincided with other community events, which is believed to have affected overall attendance.

The discussion **centred around the health and protection of ecosystems**. Community members shared stories of degrading habitats, mentioning specifically the increase in erosion near the river and the noticeable changes in migration patterns of geese and caribou; the decrease in the presence of fish from long-standing secret fishing spots; and the influx of saltwater entering the rivers. It was expressed that these changes **threaten the Cree way of life**.

There is understanding that the protection of habitats could help mitigate the negative impacts that the Cree land users are witnessing on the lands and in the waters of their territory. It was discussed that a potential advantage of having an NMCA would be **the increase in access to funding** for partnerships to **engage in ongoing monitoring and research concerning the habitats and ecosystems** of James Bay.

The potential to conduct other studies, such as the **feasibility of a commercial fishery**, was also discussed. It was stated that it could be allowed within an NMCA if the community wanted to explore this option. Community members shared stories of previous proposed projects that were never realized. **There was expressed mistrust of projects brought forward by federal government agencies**. It was stated that although the NMCA would be co-managed by the Cree and Parks Canada, it would remain Cree-led.

It is important to note that throughout the discussion, there was much confusion on the boundaries of both marine protected areas (NMCA vs. coastal waters project). The fact that the protected area would be limited to the marine area and not near the rivers, terrestrial areas of Eeyou Istchee, or the islands was likely not clearly understood by the community members in attendance.



## Chisasibi

The Open House information session in Chisasibi took place on February 20, 2024. Approximately 25 community members attended, with mainly land users, tallymen, and elders.

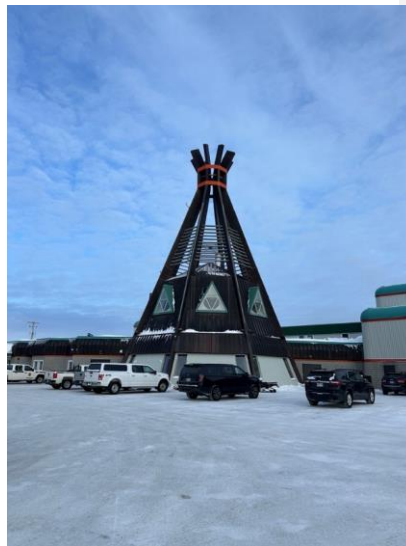
Following the presentation, community members shared their perspectives of how the environment has changed in their lifetimes. Many spoke about how the La Grande Hydroelectric Complex has caused **substantial damage to the eelgrass habitats**, which in turn has affected the presence of fish and geese in their territory. The risk of flooding from the dams was also discussed. Others spoke about a proposed Grand Canal project that was never realized, nor was the community informed of its status, but which remains a source of concern. It is noted that the history and impact of mega-infrastructure projects, whether proposed or built, has contributed to a collective sense of **mistrust of projects proposed by external government entities**.

The representatives from CNG and Parks Canada reiterated that the NMCA is a **collaborative endeavour between the Cree Nation and Parks Canada**, in which the Cree are the leaders. They stated that **nothing would happen without Cree approval**; each coastal Cree community would decide the terms and conditions that would work best for their specific community.

A Parks Canada representative acknowledged that the presence of an NMCA would **limit the type of industrial activity** that could occur within a certain buffer area. For example, a wind turbine could be installed within the protected area to serve the local community, but it would be prohibited to construct a large industrial-scale windfarm.

Community members raised questions about overlapping jurisdictions and shared access between the Cree and Nunavik Inuit. They also emphasized that the creation of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region must be **Cree-led**. For example, the Cree should be the ones who determine exactly which areas to protect and the specific limitations to any activities, e.g., hunting and fishing, tourism, development.

Some participants **expressed concerns about the proposed NMCA project**. Concerns and fears related the Grand Canal proposal from the past were expressed. It was suggested that the Crees from the other side the bay should be included in consultation. There was a general lack of clarity for some that an NMCA would be limited to the marine area and would not include the rivers or any terrestrial part of Eeyou Istchee, inland. It was reiterated that **additional engagement would take place** to explain and discuss everything further. Participants were in favour of more Cree led conservation, but how and where the protected areas tools being presented could deliver that needed more clarification and discussion.



## Waskaganish

The Open House information session in Waskaganish took place on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. Approximately 25 community members attended, with many elders, land users and some tallymen present.

As was the case in the other communities, the conversation centred around the notable deterioration of habitat over the past several decades and the negative impact it has had on the Cree way of life. Community members shared stories of the displacement of geese flocks inland whereas the geese used to migrate more along the coast. People attributed this change to the loss of vegetation/habitat along the coast where geese had once stopped to feed along their route. Many also spoke of their concern about protecting fish habitats along the coast. It was explained that the NMCA and marine protected areas cannot likely fix the problems from the past, as the changes and damage that have already happened may not be reversible. It was explained however that **some specific habitat areas could be targeted for restoration/rehabilitation**. The restoration of these habitats could also provide a food source for both geese and fish species that are important to the Cree.

**The elders, specifically the tallymen present, expressed interest in sharing their knowledge to identify important areas along the coastline that need protection and restoration.** An elder also spoke about certain areas where belugas gather, stating that the water is very clear there. Others spoke about sightings of polar bears coming closer to the islands than before, noting it as an impact of climate change. It was reiterated that the **knowledge held by elders and other land users in the community is invaluable to the creation of an NMCA**. One community member mentioned being interested in the possibility of the **Cree community partnering with research institutions** to conduct ongoing research and monitoring of the environment to develop a better understanding of the changes taking place. It was emphasized that Cree land users must play an integral part in the data collection.

**Some expressed concern about the proposed NMCA project.** A participant brought up the challenge of protecting the marine area when there are other projects being done on land, which highlights the interconnectedness of land and marine ecosystems. Another expressed concern that an NMCA would impact the number of tourists in the area. There is **concern that an NMCA could invite an influx of tourists from outside to the territory**, impeding the Cree's access to hunting and fishing.

The Parks Canada representative spoke about their approach and intention to protect places in a way that respects people's connections to these places, encompassing the cultural and economic aspects as well as the ecological. Their process entails working very heclosely with the Crees to determine the parameters, terms, and conditions for the NMCA to be established.



## Eastmain

The Open House information session in Eastmain took place on Thursday, February 22, 2024. Approximately 10 community members attended, including some tallymen and current and past elected leaders.

The community members present at the information session raised several concerns about the health and well-being of the environment. Many recounted stories about the impact of the Hydro-Québec James Bay project which involved **the diversion of the Eastmain River** to serve the La Grande Hydroelectric Complex. People spoke about how the consequences of this intervention on their territory has negatively impacted their way of life. They noted that the saltwater from the bay is travelling further upstream than before, which impacts the ecological health of the river. These changes have resulted in alterations in the migration and presence of fish and fauna in the area, which makes it difficult for those who want to go out to harvest fish as they have always done. Similarly to Chisasibi, there was also discussion about a proposed Grand Canal project that never materialized but that is a source of concern.

Although community members were **open to exploring the potential of creating an NMCA**, they also **expressed disappointment** that such a process was not envisioned before the hydroelectric projects in the 1990s and in 2005, which resulted in irreparable damage to the ecosystems of eastern James Bay. **They expressed interest in protecting the entire coastline**, but some mentioned that the Québec government had previously refused to protect the coastlines. They wanted to maintain a certain access for future development prospects. Some community members expressed a certain level of mistrust of the proposal, but still saw some potential benefits and opportunities.

In addition to the perceived **opportunity to restore and protect the coastal ecosystems**, the community members saw the potential to **promote cultural heritage and traditional knowledge** through the establishment and management of an MPA. Some spoke about the need to **create opportunities for Cree youth to reconnect with their culture through experiences on the land**. They saw potential in developing **ties with archeologists and ecologists who could work with youth and elders** to ignite an interest in their history and culture as a means of cultivating an interest to protect their land. Some mentioned that they could **create a museum** where they could hold artifacts and teach youth and other community members about their lands and waters. The potential for developing local industries in the area despite the presence of an NMCA was also raised. Namely, people are curious to know if commercial fisheries and windfarms would be an option in the context of an NMCA.



## Whapmagoostui

In June 2024, an Information Session was held in the community of Whapmagoostui. Community members expressed a great interest in the project and found it to be extremely relevant. They hope that future discussions about the project could take place with the Inuit to explore the possibility of extending the NMCA northward into the Cree/Inuit Overlapping Interest Area in the Eeyou Marine Region.

The participants shared several ideas. They stressed the relevance of **the need to improve accessibility to the camps on the islands** and how an NMCA could support this. They mentioned the role an NMCA



could play in **monitoring the change of fauna (whales, arctic char, etc.) and flora in the bay, as well as the ice patterns**. They expressed a great interest in knowing more about the potential of **commercial fishing**, and potential plans for **tourism projects**. In addition, they mentioned the need for bigger rescue boats that can withstand the high winds, which are characteristic of Hudson Bay. They hoped that an NMCA could also provide a source additional economic support for land users, to help to offset the high cost of activities on the bay. Lastly, the idea of creating an online platform that would support the transfer of Cree knowledge to Youth also emerged.

## 1.4 SYNTHESIS OF COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

Overall, there is an interest to continue the dialogue around the potential establishment of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region. Community members in Wemindji, Chisasibi, Waskaganish, Eastmain, and Whapmagoostui expressed interest for marine protection and continued conservation. Although community members raised different points and concerns during the information sessions, the overall interest in the NMCA project was positive, as long as it does not affect Cree rights and activities.

In each of the coastal Cree communities, community members also expressed concerns about the proposed NMCA project, citing previous government-led projects on their territory and the damage they caused. The negative impacts of the La Grande Hydroelectric Complex was a recurring topic of discussion in the Cree communities, especially in Chisasibi and Eastmain.

Common themes of **interests and concerns** raised in the communities include the following:

- Ecological degradation; e.g., the impact of increased sedimentation due to erosion and the destruction eelgrass beds.
- Observed changes in the environment, possibly related to climate change; e.g., changing migration patterns of fish, geese, caribou, and moose; presence of polar bears further south.
- Possible impediments on economic development, such as wind-generated energy and commercial fisheries.
- Impact of tourism (too many visitors) on traditional Cree activities.
- Concerns about the intentions of non-Cree government agencies and entities, related to past projects and proposed projects on their territory.
- Importance that the management of the NMCA, and that any related initiatives are Cree-led and serve the interests of the Cree communities.
- Need for clarification concerning jurisdiction and permitted uses for various land users (Cree vs. non-Cree).

Despite the concerns stated above, community members in Wemindji, Chisasibi, Waskaganish, Eastmain, and Whapmagoostui saw potential benefits and opportunities related to the creation of a marine protected area. Common themes relating to potential benefits and opportunities from the establishment of an NMCA include the following:



- Ecological restoration and protection from further degradation, especially along the coastline (e.g., eelgrass beds).
- Protection of habitats for species of particular importance to the Cree.
- Partnerships with research institutions to develop sustainable Cree-led monitoring programs to develop a greater understanding of the marine environment using traditional and western knowledge.
- Valorizations of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage through research and programming.
- Creation of programs to support youth in learning about the territory and to support the Cree traditional way of life.

Overall, there is an interest to continue the dialogue around the potential creation of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region, although there was notable confusion among participants as to the limits of the NMCA study area. Many spoke about issues related to rivers and lands, which NMCA would not impact at all. Community members spoke of the need for future consultations; some specified the need to include youth and other members of the community next time to be able to hear from other points of view.

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Information Sessions conducted in the coastal Cree communities served as the preamble for the upcoming community engagement sessions. The experience shed light on the main preoccupations of each community and revealed several common interests and concerns among the communities. In preparation for the second step of community engagement, certain lessons gleaned from the information sessions are presented below. The recommendations are based on key observations noted during the information sessions. Addressing them directly would help improve the outcomes of the upcoming community engagement sessions. The issues to address include the following:

- although the overall participation of community members met expectations, there was limited participation of certain community members, notably few women and youth were present during the discussions;
- the communication methods and tools used to present and explain the NMCA concept and proposal in the context of the EMR could be elaborated to ensure understanding;
- the presentation of the various actors/jurisdictions involved, and their boundaries could be made more visual for greater clarity; and
- an explanation of how the engagement sessions align with the feasibility study timeline and other conservation initiatives.

The intention is that the CNG, with its collaborating partners, can improve the quality and clarity of the information shared to ensure that community members understand the entirety of the NMCA proposition and how the establishment of an NMCA, as well as the coastal water project in collaboration with Parks Canada and the government of Québec, would impact the Cree way of life.

As such, this section concludes the report by presenting a list of recommendations based on the comments and observations from the information sessions. These recommendations are important considerations for the planning and execution of the community engagement sessions in the communities scheduled to take place in May and June 2024.

## 2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to serve as a guide for the planning and preparation for the upcoming community engagement sessions. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

### Mobilizing community participation

- Develop an agile engagement strategy designed to attract a diverse and representative segment of the community population with a focus on encouraging youth and women to participate in the activities.
  - o Target community groups/organizations and schools to publicize the events.
  - o Identify key people from each community who can help mobilize people to participate.

### Preparing presentation and communication materials for the sessions

- Present the NMCA concept in more concrete terms (What is it about? What would it look like?)
  - o Present the project by adopting a different angle than that of the protection of the waters. Highlight instead the recurrent funding that would generate from the NMCA agreement (e.g., to answer the question: What's in it for us?) and the possible benefits for the communities, such as the preservation of culture, creation of jobs, etc. It is also important to highlight the potential constraints on development imposed by the NMCA.
  - o Provide a visual example of possible scenarios using a fictional island in eastern James Bay as a case study to show how the application of an NMCA could impact the access and use of islands and marine areas based on certain criteria.
  - o Present examples of Guardians programs in NMCAs (e.g., Haida Gwaii Watchmen).
  - o Provide examples from other existing NMCAs of its potential economic benefits (e.g., sustainable sources of funding for infrastructure; youth and local employment opportunities; tourism-related; aquaculture; etc.)
  - o Present scenarios of possible partnerships and the associated financial and cultural benefit for the communities (e.g., valorization of traditional knowledge; protection of habitats and species of interest to the Crees)

- Consider including one or more community members to assist in the engagement strategy and help develop effective and adapted methodological tools along with BC2.
- Design a timeline of all concurrent projects that align with the NMCA project.
- Present the stakeholders and their mandates in a more cohesive manner and explain that together they can help the CNG realize its Conservation Strategy
  - EMRPC's land use planning process and its role in the NMCA Feasibility Study Area, and role in the broader Eeyou Marine Region.
  - MELCCFP interest in coastal waters area protection within their area of jurisdiction, as well as for terrestrial protected areas in a complementary approach to that of the marine environment.
  - Parks Canada, whose role is to create conservation areas throughout Canada, oversees the NMCA, which encompasses only the marine area outside of Québec, excluding coastlines, inland areas, and islands.
- Address the governance question:
  - Who has the right to access an NMCA and when (e.g., tourists/visitors)?
  - What activities are allowed or prohibited within an NMCA?
  - Where are the jurisdictional boundaries and where do they overlap? (e.g., EMR land use plan).
  - How will the NMCA be co-managed and by whom (specify lead roles and responsibilities)?
- Crees are storytellers. Consider incorporating storytelling as a presentation/communication method.
- Coordinate and improve the design of all maps to ensure effective presentation of the concept and boundaries.
  - Use a larger font for the titles of maps (printed copies and in the presentation).
  - Colour code with a bolder choice of colours to indicate the areas of all the concurrent projects more clearly. Suggested zones to code: Nunavik Inuit; Islands (EMR); Marine; Coastal; Terrestrial

### **Facilitation of the public engagement session**

- Ensure adequate time to properly prepare the material and set up the room prior to commencing the engagement session.

- Engage a community member who can take notes of comments and questions when presented in Cree. The notes can later be translated into English to ensure all voices are heard and recorded for the final report.
- Focus on the marine area, and specifically the NMCA study area, in the presentation and activities to avoid confusion.
- Ask participants to respond to a questionnaire to receive additional feedback and comments and to see if the engagement session met the objectives.
- Reiterate the timeline. Specify that the final recommendations for the NMCA will be presented in the summer 2024. If the CNG decides to go forward with negotiations with Parks Canada, the formal establishment of an NMCA in the EMR would be one to two years in the future, after the conclusion of the negotiations.

## **2.2 CONCLUSION**

One of the main observations from the Information Sessions that should be addressed in the preparation for the community engagement sessions is the communication methods and tools used to inform community members about the NMCA and coastal waters project. The recommendations listed above provide a checklist of items and actions to consider in the preparation for the next series of engagement sessions. It was evident during the discussion periods that the community members did not fully understand the limits of the NMCA study area nor how it relates to other conservation initiatives in the region. It would be useful to present these perimeters more clearly while also discussing what an NMCA would mean for the Cree if it were implemented by using concrete examples from other NMCAs or enacting potential scenarios with the Eeyou Marine Region as the context. The clarity of information in the presentation, along with a greater participation among women and youth will improve the quality of the discussion and the nature of the feedback received. This will help determine social acceptability among the Cree communities and support CNG's decision on whether to move forward with the proposed NMCA.

# ANNEX A

## REPRESENTATIVES WHO COLLABORATED ON THE INFORMATION SESSIONS

### Cree Nation Government

- Norman A. Wapachee (Deputy Grand Chief)
- Chantal Otter Tetreault
- Christopher Beck
- Rosanna Wisden

### Cree First Nation Representatives

- Wayne Cheezo (Waskaganish)
- Alvin Cheezo (Eastmain)
- Howard MacDonald (Wemindji)
- Sheree House (Chisasibi)
- Anderson Jolly (Chisasibi)
- Eddie Mastly Sr. (Whapmagoostui)
- Joshua J. Kawapit (Whapmagoostui)

### Parks Canada

- Diane Blanchard
- Chantal Ouimet
- Sarah Culley
- Andr ee-Anne Rouleau

### Minist re de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP, Government of Qu bec)

- Solenn Sanquer

- Virginie Galindo
- Francis Bouchard

**Eeyou Marine Regional Planning Commission (EMRPC)**

- James O'Leary
- James Bobbish
- Joyce Tshiyoyo

**Groupe BC2 Inter-Nations Team**

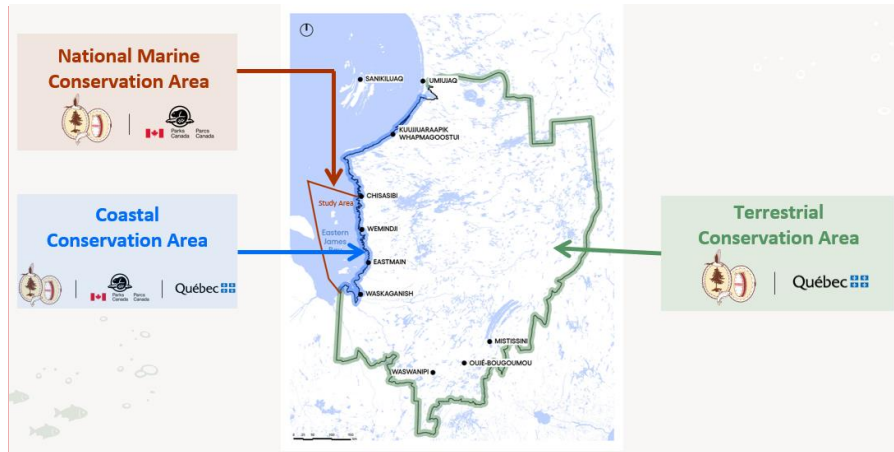
- Faten Kikano (and BC2 colleagues)

# ANNEX B

Annex B includes the maps presented to the communities by the different stakeholders to show the different zones and study areas related to the various conservation efforts in Eeyou Istchee.

## SELECTION OF MATERIALS PRESENTED DURING THE INFORMATION SESSIONS IN THE CREE COMMUNITIES

### Collaborative Approach in Eeyou Istchee: Key Stakeholders



Commented [CB1]: Change map for whapmagoostui version

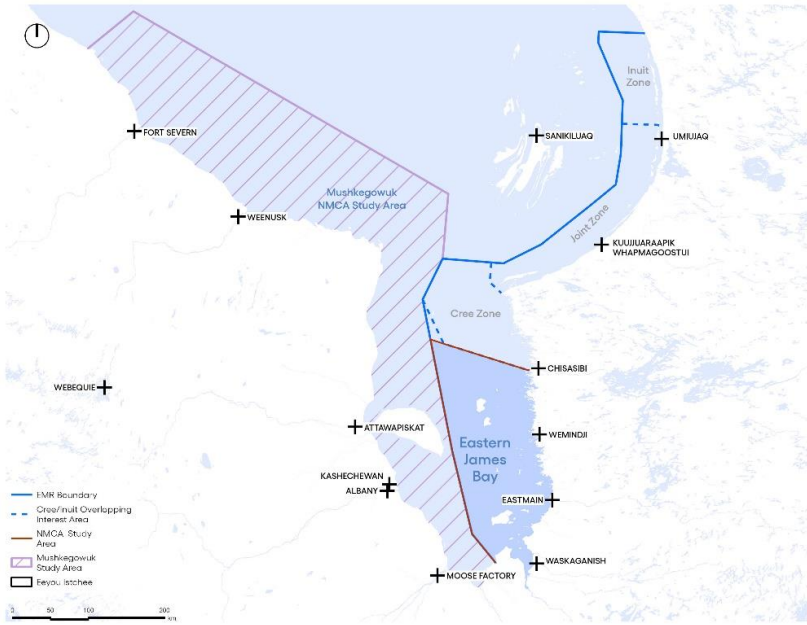
## History of Protected Areas in Eeyou Istchee: From Land to Sea

*The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy – Terrestrial Protected Areas Network Highlighted*

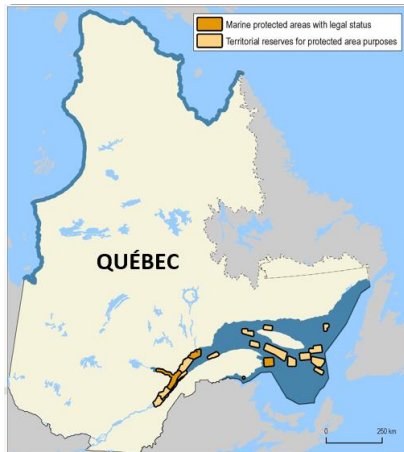




## National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) Study Area



## Québec Marine Protected Areas (MPA)



- The **MPA Network** represent **10.4 %** of Québec's marine environment
- Target of **30%** of protected and conserved marine areas for 2030
- Identify areas of conservation in coastal waters of Eastern James Bay
- Ensure alignment of protection projects in the marine, coastal and terrestrial areas

All the information collected in the coming months during the consultations will be also used for the reflection on coastal waters protection.

# **NMCA ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS REPORT**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

After the signing of the 2019 MOU for the assessment of the feasibility of establishing a national marine conservation area (NMCA) in the Eeyou Marine Region, engagement activities were initiated by the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada to introduce the National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) project. However, efforts to carry out engagement sessions were delayed due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic from 2020 to 2022, and due to forest fires in 2023 in Eeyou Istchee.

In October 2023, a workshop on the NMCA project provided coastal Cree community representatives an overview of potential concerns, opportunities, and aspirations that could be raised if an NMCA were to be established and implemented. This served as a basis to further engage the coastal Cree communities with Information Sessions in February 2024 and Engagement Sessions in May and June 2024. These sessions took place in the communities adjacent to the study area: Eastmain, Waskaganish, Wemindji, and Chisasibi.

In June 2024, an Information Session was held in the community of Whapmagoostui, and the comments and ideas raised from this community will be documented in the Information Sessions Report. However, it is relevant to say that Whapmagoostui community members expressed a great interest in the project and found it to be extremely relevant. They hope that future discussions about the project could take place with the the Inuit to explore the possibility of extending the NMCA northward into the Overlapping Interest Area in the Eeyou Marine Region..

During the engagement sessions, representatives from the Cree Nation Government (CNG) and Parks Canada presented information on the NMCA project and on other Cree conservation initiatives in Eeyou Istchee. The participants were able to ask questions and express their thoughts, needs, aspirations, and concerns during these engagement sessions. The planned format was to carry out a short, twenty-minute presentation at the beginning of each engagement session, followed by a focus group activity that involved asking the participants with some leading questions. The format for the engagement activities was adapted depending on the number of participants. In fact, in some sessions, due to the reduced number of participants and the sporadic dropping in of participants at the venue, a series of one-on-one storytelling and open-ended discussions took place. During these discussions, participants still received the same information as those who attended the presentation and focus group. The engagement sessions allowed for the identification of key themes, concerns, ideas, and suggestions related to the project, sorted by community (Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi).

Subsequent to the introduction, the report contains the following sections: the objectives, methodology, the results and



key themes that emerged from each of the four communities, and a conclusion that includes recommendations.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

While the Cree engagement process as a whole (technical workshop, information sessions, and engagement sessions combined) was to assess the feasibility of an NMCA, the specific objectives of the May-June 2024 engagement sessions were to remind key stakeholders and community members about the project, and obtain feedback from them on the following points:

- The NMCA concept and benefits;
- The goals and objectives of the establishment of an NMCA in the Eeyou Marine Region;
- The fishing and harvesting rights within the NMCA study area;
- Industrial activities that are prohibited within an NMCA
- Cree culture activities within the NMCA study area;
- Key concerns/suggestions for the project; and
- Response to key questions and concerns of community members and key stakeholders<sup>1</sup>.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Between May and June 2024, the Cree Nation Government (CNG) led the engagement phase in Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi to remind key stakeholders and community members about the project and to gather feedback from specific demographics within the communities.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

In each of the four communities, the Cree Nation Government was responsible for the logistics and organization of field activities, including the selection of an accessible venue to conduct the engagement sessions. Supported by BC2, the consulting firm that supported the CNG throughout the process, the engagement team set up the venue by hanging explanatory sheets and maps on the walls, setting up a projection screen and laying out other materials for the promotion and discussion of the project. Snacks and coffee were served, provided by a local caterer.

Four engagement sessions were planned with the following demographics in the communities: 1) youth; 2) women; 3) elders and land users; and 4) local Cree First Nation Staff and Councillors. The engagement sessions were divided in two main parts. In the first part, members of the engagement team presented the project. The presentation was followed by a focus group activity, which used leading questions to collect feedback from the community members. As previously mentioned, at

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as “participants” throughout the document

times, when the attendance number was lower or if community members visited the venue sporadically during the scheduled engagement session, the format of the engagement session was adapted to engage with community members one on one and present the information and obtain their feedback.

In addition, there were special meetings that also took place in the communities to inform specific groups, specifically the political representatives of the communities, to present the project and get their feedback.

## **COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

During the Information Sessions conducted in February 2024, information regarding the NMCA project was presented to coastal Cree community members using a PowerPoint presentation. This method of communication did not fully serve the purpose of providing enough information on how an NMCA would benefit the coastal Cree communities. The presentation provided a lot of technical information on NMCAs, but it did not fully answer the overarching question that emerged from almost all the communities: “What’s in it for the Crees?”

Based on the learnings drawn from the information sessions, a new communication tool, the storytelling method, was created (see Annex 1). It was inspired by the storytelling communication style of the Crees. Adopting the Crees’ communication style was done in order to be more effective, and as a sign of respect.

The other significant change in the communication style concerned the content which focused on answering the question that was raised and explaining through Cree real-life situations (the story), the benefits of the NMCA for the coastal communities of Eeyou Istchee.

The story focused on four main themes: the management of an NMCA, the Cree culture under an NMCA, development and opportunities, and the role of an NMCA in the protection of the ecosystem. These four themes were artistically portrayed in four sheets. Two characters were created to tell the story: a grandfather ‘Nomshoom’, and his granddaughter Kaya. The story follows the two characters on their morning stroll along the shore, where both Nomshoom and Kaya explain what an NMCA is and how it can benefit their communities. The story represents Cree daily life situations (see Annex 2). The feedback from the participants was very positive and their level of comprehension of what the project was about was a testament to this new engagement method.

The sheets were printed in a large size format and hung on the venues’ walls. They were also printed in a smaller scale and placed on tables to help facilitate conversation in the focus group activity. An animated PowerPoint presentation was projected on a screen to support the storytelling for bigger groups. As for smaller groups, members of the engagement team walked through the sheets and told the story to community members. A focus group guide was created for both engaging with bigger groups or in the open-ended one on one discussions (see Annex 3). The flexibility and adaptability of the method allowed the collection of an optimal amount of information and feedback from the communities. The data collected was analysed and summarized in this report.

## 4. THE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

### 4.1 CREE NATION OF WASKAGANISH

A total of three engagement sessions were held in Waskaganish on May 21 and 22. These sessions include: an afternoon session with the youth group on May 21 (11 participants), a morning session mainly with Cree Nation of Waskaganish staff and Council members, and women on May 22 (6 participants), and an afternoon session with Elders and Land Users on May 22 (13 participants).

The Cree Nation of Waskaganish indicated strong support for the NMCA project. General comments, as well as questions and concerns, are detailed below.

#### **General Comments**

##### **Preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language**

Participants felt that an NMCA could help preserve the Cree way of life. The implementation of the project could notably encourage certain groups, especially youth and families, to go out on the Bay more often, as this practice has decreased significantly over the last 15-20 years, especially in the summer. In Waskaganish, participants shared that people tend to hunt more on the land than the Bay, and that an NMCA could help re-energize their relationship with the offshore area.

##### **Food security: traditional and new food sources**

Several participants mentioned that research and information generated through NMCA implementation could help in providing a better understanding of what food sources might exist in the waters and the islands of the bay (such as Charlton Island). They viewed the NMCA as a means to improve food security, especially given the uncertainty of the impacts of climate change on their terrestrial food sources and the growth of the community.

##### **Tourism and other job opportunities**

There was great interest in the economic opportunities that could be created through an NMCA, especially in the tourism industry. Youth were interested in summer programming, internships, and other employment opportunities that could result from the project. Participants also supported the notion that an NMCA could lead to the creation of professional development and training opportunities, as well as the creation of jobs both directly and indirectly related to the tourism industry. The participants from Waskaganish felt that they would stand to benefit the most from tourism, as they are the southernmost community along the coast.

In addition to jobs in tourism, there was also interest in potential jobs in research and monitoring. Participants expressed a desire to better understand where the fish in the James Bay come from and the size of fish populations. They also expressed a desire to increase their knowledge of other wildlife in the James Bay, such as seals and polar bears. They were also interested in the potential of research projects to better understand the impacts of climate change on wildlife migration and ice formation.

### Coastal marine protection, an important preoccupation of Crees

Participants were passionate about the idea of protecting the coastal region. One participant highlighted the fact that the NMCA project should include the entire Bay, and not just the eastern portion, as it is all connected. They also expressed the belief that monitoring would be a positive element of the project and could also encourage people to go out in the Bay more often. One participant also suggested creating positions for people to spend time out on the water to ensure safety and monitor other marine activity, as well as visit islands that are not often visited, such as Strutton Island. They also noted that since water conditions have changed, boats sometimes get grounded when the tide goes out.

### Questions/Concerns

Despite the overall enthusiasm for the project, several concerns were expressed during the sessions. While not directly related to the NMCA project, there are continued fears of a Grand Canal scheme, - an idea first proposed in 1959 that would have led to the damming of the James Bay so as to make it a freshwater lake. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for more research to be carried out to learn about the ecological impacts of Hydro-Québec's dams on James Bay.

In terms of the NMCA project, some participants, particularly the youth, expressed disappointment that the engagement sessions were not better advertised. Finally, a few participants were worried that increased tourism could have unexpected and undesirable consequences.





## **4.2 CREE NATION OF EASTMAIN**

Engagement sessions in Eastmain included an afternoon/evening open house session (18 participants) on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, and two focus group sessions in the morning of May 24. One focus group session was with the youth (an elementary school teacher and his seven students), and the other was with land users (20 participants)

The Cree Nation of Eastmain was in support of the NMCA project. General comments as well as questions and concerns are detailed below.

### **General comments**

#### **Preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language**

As in Waskaganish, participants from Eastmain viewed the NMCA project as a way to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language. They mentioned that people tend to hunt on the land or on inland rivers more, and that this project could help re-establish the relationship with the Bay. Participants also mentioned that the project will allow them to share the Cree way of life and culture. There is also a desire to phase out the usage of the name “James Bay” and instead favour the Cree-language name, Wiinipaakw. Participants also believed that an NMCA could create an opportunity to value indigenous knowledge and reinstate some past traditions (such as cooling items in the sand like goose grease). Some participants also believe that it could serve as an occasion to consolidate knowledge of Cree place names, while hoping that this could even be incorporated into the local school curriculum. Another idea was that the NMCA could help build on existing cultural programs, for example, through the creation of cultural days on the water or the enhancement of existing fishing programs.

#### **Access and Safe Travels to Offshore Waters and Islands**

Like in Waskaganish, participants in Eastmain do not go out into the Bay as often as they used to. One participant wondered why the Inuit no longer come to Cape Hope Island. Another participant observed that accessibility to the Bay has diminished in some areas due to the phenomenon of isostatic rebound. This same phenomenon has also changed the profile of the coastline.

#### **Food Security: Traditional and New Food Sources**

Participants noted that some islands have blueberries, cranberries, and other berries. They also remarked that some berries have disappeared due to changes related to hydro electric development and climate change, and they were curious to see what role a NMCA could play in the restoration of these species. Some Elders mentioned that some of the islands near Eastmain have lakes, and that these lakes are good fishing spots for arctic char. They hoped the NMCA would support them in their fishing activities and in monitoring and protecting the marine ecosystem.

#### **Tourism and Other Job Opportunities**

Participants expressed enthusiasm about tourism and identified several opportunities that could come from tourism. In the summer, one participant envisioned teaching people how to cut, dry, and store fish and/or pound it into powder. Another participant mentioned the idea of building camps on the island using teepees for tourists to sleep, cook, etc. An advantage of this idea is that teepees can be assembled and disassembled after each use. Participants also mentioned that funding is required for boat transportation to the islands and for shelters, and that families often require more financial aid to organize and take part in such activities.

In addition to tourism job opportunities, participants also supported the creation of jobs through a type of Guardian program that could be created through an NMCA, like in Haida Gwaii. Participants also mentioned that there is already a land keeper's program, mostly in Waskaganish, as well as another program through the Cree Trappers Association. Participants supported the idea that the youth could be brought in from different communities to train as Guardians. Participants also suggested creating programs to introduce students to Guardians programs. In general, participants supported the creation of jobs that an NMCA could offer.

### **Research Opportunities**

Participants supported the research opportunities that could be created under an NMCA. Many participants mentioned that the most recent comprehensive studies of the James Bay and surrounding rivers were all carried out before Hydro-Québec's interventions in the area. As a result, these same participants expressed a desire for further studies on James Bay and surrounding rivers post-Hydro-Québec Complex and believed that an NMCA could help achieve this. Some community members expressed curiosity about fish migration patterns in light of new sediments that block the rivers, as well as the impact saltwater has on marine life.

### **Coastal Marine Protection Is an Important Preoccupation for the Crees**

Participants spoke about the importance of protecting the marine region. They expressed the belief that Cree are just one part of the larger ecosystem. They also stated that going out on the water could have health benefits, not only due to the physical activity, but also because of the benefits of eating wild harvested foods. Participants mentioned how Hydro-Québec's dams have negatively impacted water levels in the Bay, referring to how community members used to fish more and have enough to share it with other community members. Participants were favourable towards an NMCA as they believe that it could help protect the fish and wildlife in the Bay.

### **Questions/Concerns**

There were no concerns brought up by participants that were directly related to the NMCA project. However, several more general concerns about the James Bay were brought up. Firstly, there was the suggestion to get rid of the name "James Bay" and replace it with a Cree-language name. Additionally, many participants spoke about the negative impacts of Hydro-Québec on the Bay and the surrounding waters. One such impact is the emergence of more clay in the water due to changing water levels and tides. Another concern is the difficulty of accessing the Bay and the islands by boat,

largely due to cost and a lack of knowledge of the safest routes. One participant also expressed concerns regarding overgrown vegetation at fishing camps on the islands, that needs to be cleaned up.



## **4.3 CREE NATION OF WEMINDJI**

A total of three engagement sessions were held in Wemindji on June 3 and 4, 2024. These included an afternoon focus group session with Council members and land users (12 participants), an evening session with youth (4 participants), and an afternoon open house with 17 participants.

Overall, participants from the Cree Nation of Wemindji showed a high level of support for the NMCA project. They also expressed several concerns which did not dissuade them from supporting the project overall. Participants' general comments, as well as questions and concerns, are presented below.

### **General comments**

#### **The Islands**

Participants in Wemindji emphasized their strong connection to the Bay and its islands. People go to the islands during the regular spring goose break and the second one which takes place in June during the arrival of the longneck geese. Participants mentioned that a variety of people go out to the islands, including families. Participants hoped that an NMCA would help protect these traditional hunting areas.

#### **Preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language**

Participants believed that the NMCA could help preserve and promote the Cree way of life, culture, and language. The youth that took part in the consultations wished to learn more about their culture, both in the community and out on the land. Participants also mentioned the islands in the Bay as a key part of maintaining the Cree way of life, culture, and language. Some participants mentioned that there should not be any development on the islands, and that they should be preserved in their natural state. In this way, the islands will be shown as they are to the world.

#### **Access and Safe Travel to Offshore Waters and Islands**

Participants mentioned that the natural environment does not pose issues for accessing offshore waters and islands, as the tide range is minimal. Participants also spoke about fishing derbies that take place in the rivers, on the coastline, and in the Bay near Wemindji. The fishing derbies mostly attract people from Wemindji. The derbies that take place in the Bay are for fishing sea trout, arctic char, and skulffish.

#### **Food security: traditional and new food sources**

Participants spoke about the various food sources that are present in the Bay and the islands in the Bay. Participants mentioned that the islands have mushrooms and various types of berries, including blackberries, raspberries, cranberries, strawberries, gooseberries, and cloudberry. Participants were interested in the possible research that could be carried out through an NMCA to better understand the plants and mushrooms that are on the islands. Participants also mentioned the diverse fish species that can be found in the Bay, including cod and rainbow smelt.

#### **Jobs in tourism and research**

There was a lot of interest in the potential jobs in tourism and other domains that could be created through an NMCA. There was also interest in jobs that would be created out in the Bay. Participants expressed support for the NMCA project, as they believe it could help better manage tourist behaviour, and it could help the Crees inform tourists about the travel requirements and risks in the Bay. One participant who runs a marine tourism company hoped that an NMCA could help increase tourism to pre-COVID-19 levels, and lead to the creation of more jobs on the land and the water.

Among the youth, a key theme that emerged was the importance of building on programs that already exist in the community through, rather than creating new ones. The youth also insisted on the importance of increasing participation in various programs related to the land and water. They were also interested in how an NMCA could help with research and the creation of job opportunities in research, considering that resources are currently limited.

### **Monitoring**

Participants were interested in the monitoring opportunities that an NMCA could offer. Participants expressed an interest in developing a more rigorous monitoring system through an NMCA. One participant noted that eel grass has decreased and theorized that this could be due to the changes in climate, the amount of saltwater, and decreasing water levels. Another participant observed that there has been an increase in various types of jellyfish in the water, but that they do not sting and are quite fragile, hence the need for monitoring to protect the balance in the marine ecosystem. Participants also insisted on the importance of combining Cree knowledge with scientific knowledge for any monitoring activities.

### **Questions/concerns**

#### **Questions and concerns related to the NMCA project**

Participants had several questions about the NMCA project. Youth participants questioned management and governance; they wanted to know if the Canadian government or the Cree got to select the region to be protected. They also expressed concerns that any training provided through an NMCA should be matched with employment needs, and that there should be a balance between the number of trained people and available jobs.

#### **Safety in the Bay**

There were also concerns expressed about safety in the Bay. Several participants mentioned that polar bears are becoming more and more common in the area. Some insisted on the importance of ensuring sufficient water safety and emergency response services, especially if the NMCA project would lead to more people going out into the Bay.

#### **Health of the Bay's Ecosystem**

Some participants expressed concerns about the health of the Bay's ecosystem. One participant explained that there is a lot of garbage on the islands and wanted to know if an NMCA could contribute to clean-up efforts. Others worried that environmental damage from nearby mines could end up affecting the water near Wemindji in the future. Many agreed that even if the NMCA is implemented, the protection of the environment is an individual responsibility.



#### **4.4 CREE NATION OF CHISASIBI**

Engagement sessions were held in Chisasibi on June 5 and 6, 2024. These included an afternoon session with youth (7 participants), a morning session with women (1 participant) and an afternoon session with land users (7 participants). There was also a meeting between the Cree Nation of Chisasibi Council, and reps from the Cree Nation Government, Parks Canada, and the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (20 participants). A focus group style approach was used for the sessions with the youth and the land users, while the session for women, where the sole attendee was a previous Chair for the Board of Health and Education, took the form of an open-ended discussion.

Participants from the Cree Nation of Chisasibi were supportive of the project. Overall, engagement session participants were in favour of the NMCA project. There were several concerns expressed regarding the finer details of the project and the management of the increase in tourism that the project could bring about, but these concerns did not change the high level of support that participants expressed for the project.

#### **General Comments**

##### **Preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language**

As in other coastal Cree Nations, participants believed that an NMCA could contribute to the preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language. Participants supported the fact that an NMCA could help lead to the delimitation of certain areas and the creation of zones where only Cree would be allowed. Older participants believed that it could lead to further youth engagement in the preservation of the culture.

Participants mentioned the possible positive influence of the NMCA on the sense of ownership and empowerment amongst the Crees.

### **Access and safe travels to offshore waters and islands**

Participants were interested in the opportunities that an NMCA could provide for people to access the Bay more easily. Some participants mentioned that accessing the Bay is difficult for those who do not have boats or the money to head out easily. Participants also believed that some members of the community used to go out in the Bay more often when they were younger. They explained that there is a ferry from the mainland to Fort George Island, the former location of Chisasibi. They believed that the NMCA project would provide opportunities to go out on the Bay more easily, through employment opportunities in the Bay.

### **Food security: traditional and new food sources and monitoring**

Participants expressed their concern regarding the changes in the Bay and their impact on the quality and the quantity of the harvest (fish and other marine life). According to them, these changes are due to contamination and the diversion of the rivers' flow. Implicitly, the blame was on the hydro dams. They also expressed their concern about damage caused by lithium mining. According to them, the NMCA will help monitor the fauna and flora and track activities such as fishing.

### **Tourism and Other Job Opportunities**

Opinions were divided regarding tourism as some elders were worried about the consequences of activities related to the tourism industry. However, most elders and youth were open to the idea. Participants seemed to appreciate and encourage the concept of seasonal tourism.

Most of them felt that an NMCA will create interesting job opportunities, especially in the tourism industry. One participant mentioned that the NMCA project will help the Cree become more self-sustaining and independent through the jobs that could be created. Another mentioned that the jobs created through an NMCA could serve as an alternative to social security, especially for those community members who are already out on the water or the land. There was also an interest in jobs in research, as participants believe that this could allow for the exploration of unexplored waters in the Bay.

## **Questions/concerns**

### **The unhealed impacts of the Hydro dams**

In Chisasibi, especially amongst the elders, there exists a feeling of mistrust of initiatives proposed by external governments. This pattern was identified during the information sessions. It is attributable to a large part to the negative impacts that large scale hydro electric development has had on the community, which include the community's displacement and relocation. But despite expressions of pain, skepticism, and uncertainty, the community members expressed support for, and interest in, the NMCA.

Some of the questions focused on the timing of the NMCA and the reason why it was not proposed earlier, to which some of the Elders replied that previously, other projects were more urgent.

They perceived the project as a chance to support the planning for the rapid growth of the community. They also believed that by promoting the Cree culture, the project may help change the general public's perception of the Crees, from a more negative one to something more positive. They mentioned the isolation of the region and its richness in minerals and other resources. They believe that the NMCA and other similar initiatives would protect it from potential unwanted industrial development initiatives.

### **Questions and Concerns Related to the NMCA Project**

Some participants wondered whether each of the coastal communities will have a centre or physical building for the management of the NMCA. A CNG representative explained that the NMCA management could be based largely in one of the communities, but that these things would be discussed and decided in the future if the project goes forward. Issues related to capacity to manage tourists and resources were raised. Parks Canada representatives reassured the participants by highlighting the role that trained Guardians would have in protecting the Bay and making sure that

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, participants from the four coastal communities in which engagement sessions were held expressed a high level of support for the NMCA project. The reasons differed slightly from one community to the other, as each community has a different connection with the waters of the Bay. However the overarching message from all of the communities was one of strong support for the project.

During engagement sessions, it was clear that community members tend to have a stronger connections to the land than to the water. This was particularly evident in Waskaganish and Eastmain, where access to the Bay can be more complicated than in Wemindji and Chisasibi, partially due to the tides and the greater distance from the community to the Bay.

A key question that emerged from Cree community members during the February 2024 information sessions was "what's in it for us?". During the May/June 2024 engagement sessions, the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada sought to answer this question by presenting the NMCA project based on a storytelling method through four key themes: Management, Culture, Opportunities, and Ecosystems (see Chapter 2.1 of Annex 2.1). This helped participants better understand the advantages and potential limits of an NMCA in a much clearer way.

In all four communities, the major reasons that participants supported the project were 1) the project's potential to help the Crees with the preservation and protection of their culture and 2) the diverse economic opportunities that the project could generate. These two elements were the most-cited reasons for the project's acceptance and support. Other reasons, such as the potential to improve food security, increase research and monitoring, and provide safer and more frequent access to the Bay, were also brought up during the engagement sessions, but they were not key reasons behind the large support for the project.



Engagement session participants also expressed a few concerns, mostly regarding safety and tourism. Participants indicated that it would be important to properly instruct tourists, and even Crees, in proper safety measures before heading out into the Bay. There were also some concerns about the impacts of increased tourism and about the capacity the communities have to handle it. Some worried that the project would be difficult to manage by the Crees and that they would be left to handle it on their own without the support of Parks Canada. Some others expressed concerns regarding the timeline of the project, noting that the project and its multiple economic benefits were needed as soon as possible. The idea that the protection of the environment is an individual responsibility, that of every Cree, emerged in more than one community; participants who expressed this idea insisted on the sustained accountability of the Crees in the protection of their water and land, regardless of the projects and programs that could be implemented. However, no participants judged that these concerns were more significant than the potential advantages that an NMCA could bring about.



Despite the concerns that were expressed, support for the NMCA project was strong in the coastal Cree communities. Participants were enthusiastic about the opportunities that an NMCA could create and expressed hope that the project would deliver the expected results.



## 5. ANNEX A

### SHEETS USED DURING ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS



Envision what a national marine conservation area (NMCA) could look like for the Eeyou Marine Region.

Indigenous traditional uses would be allowed in a national marine conservation area.

## Management

**A Cree-led collaborative approach to Governance and Management.**

The Eeyou Cree are the traditional owners of the land and water in the Eeyou Marine Region. They have lived on this land for thousands of years and have a deep understanding of the land and water. They are the ones who should be leading the way in managing the land and water in the Eeyou Marine Region.

Traditional Eeyou Cree governance is based on consensus and is led by the Eeyou Council. The Eeyou Council is made up of representatives from all Eeyou Cree communities. They meet regularly to discuss and make decisions on behalf of the Eeyou Cree people.

The Eeyou Cree are working with the Government of Canada to establish a national marine conservation area in the Eeyou Marine Region. This area would be managed by the Eeyou Cree and the Government of Canada in a collaborative approach to governance and management.

**What's in it for the Cree?**

The Eeyou Cree would have a say in how the land and water in the Eeyou Marine Region is managed. They would be able to protect their traditional uses and way of life. They would also be able to benefit from the economic opportunities that a national marine conservation area could bring.

**Activities that would not be allowed in a national marine conservation area:**

- Oil and gas exploration and production
- Offshore wind energy
- Large-scale commercial fishing
- Large-scale industrial development
- Large-scale infrastructure projects
- Large-scale resource extraction

**Under the NMCA, the Eeyou Marine Region would be subject to new legislation, which prohibits various industrial activities.**

It will be a collaborative approach to governance and management. The Eeyou Cree and the Government of Canada will work together to manage the land and water in the Eeyou Marine Region.

**It will be a collaborative approach to governance and management. The Eeyou Cree and the Government of Canada will work together to manage the land and water in the Eeyou Marine Region.**

The national marine conservation area (NMCA) empowers Cree to preserve knowledge, traditions, and environmental and cultural traditions for future generations.

## Culture

How could the Cree promote and protect their culture through an NMCA?

**AYIMUWIN**  
Word - Language - Speech

**Cultural programs will be developed to promote and protect Cree culture. These programs will include:**

- Traditional Eeyou Cree knowledge and skills training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree language and dialect training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree arts and crafts training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree music and dance training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree history and heritage training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree environmental and natural resource management training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree governance and leadership training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree health and wellness training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree spiritual and religious training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree social and community training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree economic and business training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree education and literacy training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree housing and infrastructure training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree transportation and mobility training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree energy and power training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree water and wastewater training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree waste management training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree climate change and environmental training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree disaster preparedness and response training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree emergency management training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree public safety and security training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree justice and legal training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree health and social services training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree housing and homelessness training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree food and nutrition training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree child and youth services training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree elder care and support training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree mental health and substance use training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree addiction and recovery training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree employment and workforce training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree entrepreneurship and business training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree innovation and technology training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree research and development training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree education and training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree skills and workforce training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree language and literacy training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree arts and culture training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree history and heritage training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree environmental and natural resource management training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree governance and leadership training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree health and wellness training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree spiritual and religious training
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- Traditional Eeyou Cree child and youth services training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree elder care and support training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree mental health and substance use training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree addiction and recovery training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree employment and workforce training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree entrepreneurship and business training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree innovation and technology training
- Traditional Eeyou Cree research and development training

**Focus: How often you need get a Working Out Ceremony is not on any particular number of the day. Focus you'll get to make sense of the day with your grandchildren.**

**Opportunities**

Guided by the Cree principles and leadership, the national marine conservation areas (NMCA) would have opportunities to preserve the integrity of the region's natural and cultural environments.

Provincas can be developed with a philosophy of respect towards nature and culture and, ultimately, good for business, tourism, sustainability, monitoring, and economic growth in the surrounding areas.

Opportunities that can come with the establishment of the NMCA include:

- Local employment and related business opportunities, which can boost economic growth
- Capacity programs (including NMCA management, research, and knowledge transfer)

**A lot of opportunities, especially for the youth**

The NMCA would be an important role in providing opportunities for the youth to learn about the environment and the importance of the region's natural and cultural environments.

How could a NMCA promote opportunities for the Cree?

BC2

**Ecosystems**

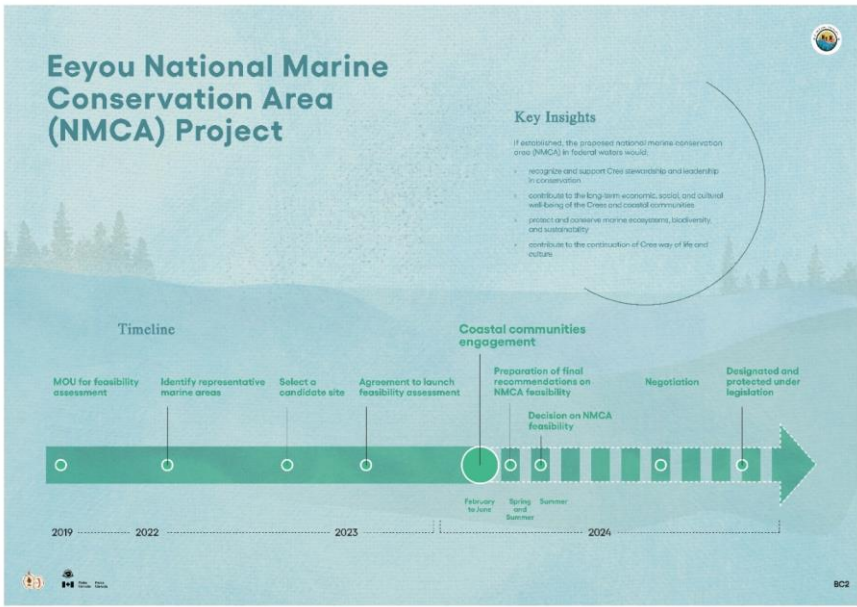
The marine area serves as a space of respectful coexistence among people, flora, and fauna. It embodies a collective system where the Cree way of life engages with and supports the habitats of all living species, fostering balanced cohabitation among all environments.

**Learning from one another for a better protection of ecosystems**

Provincas can be developed with a philosophy of respect towards nature and culture and, ultimately, good for business, tourism, sustainability, monitoring, and economic growth in the surrounding areas.

How to better protect the environment?

BC2



## 6. ANNEX B

### STORY TEXT

#### Introduction

Hello to all and thank you for welcoming us in your community! We are here to discuss with you the feasibility study for a proposed national marine conservation area (NMCA) in Eeyou Istchee.

A few months ago, we came and presented some information about the NMCA. Today, we are here to listen, but we would like to present to you a few additional elements. In our previous exchanges with you during the information sessions, we heard and enjoyed some of your stories and legends and decided to learn from you the storytelling method.

Today, we will tell you the story of Nomshoom and Kaya, his granddaughter. Nomshoom and Kaya will be having a Sunday morning spring stroll in different scenes representing the Cree way of life and Cree daily activities and cultural practices.

Kaya will be talking to Nomshoom about a NMCA. Their discussions will be around four themes: Management, Culture, Opportunities, and Ecosystem.

So, here's our story.

**(In Sheet 1)**, we will talk about management.

Kaya asks Nomshoom: "In a national marine conservation area, can we still fish, hunt, and trap?" h e replies: "Yes, this national marine conservation area must respect any Cree Treaty rights for harvesting, hunting, fishing, and trapping."

Nomshoom shows Kaya the sharing circle fostering communication, connection, and knowledge sharing with people from Parks Canada and members of the community.

He explains that "Governance and Management of a NMCA would be a Cree-led collaborative approach in a manner that respects Indigenous rights and Indigenous knowledge".

A Cree asks about the advantages of a NMCA for the Crees. "What's in it for us?" he asks. Another Cree explains that "the NMCA protects the marine environment and key habitats and sites that are important to Cree culture and way of life". Someone else in the sharing circle adds that a NMCA would be managed by a board where the Crees and the Government of Canada have equal representation.

Nomshoom explains to Kaya that access to some areas will be restricted to visitors to protect the environment and allow the Crees to continue their traditional activities in peace. He shows her a list of industrial and commercial activities that would be prohibited because they are harmful for the environment.

"Kaya", he adds, "there are restrictions, but they do not affect Cree traditional uses which would be allowed everywhere".

Nomshoom and Kaya start discussing the influence of an NMCA on Cree culture (in **Sheet 2**).

Suddenly, Nomshoom becomes nostalgic. He says to Kaya, with shining eyes: "I was there when you had your Walking-Out ceremony. It was an unforgettable moment for me. I hope you will get to

experience similar moments with your grandchildren". Through this wish, he expresses the hope that the Eeyou Istchee will endure and remain the home for future generations. He also hopes that Cree cultural practices and traditions would survive and be transmitted to the youth.

Nomshoom talks to Kaya about several cultural practices and the importance of transferring them to the youth (*show the cultural practices like stretching of the hides, smoking, fish, and the underwater world*).

Nomshoom believes that the national marine conservation area would empower the Crees in the preservation of knowledge and heritage for future generations.

Kaya is not sure she understands, and she wonders about the way that a NMCA would promote and help to maintain the Cree way of life. But while walking near a boat with fishermen, she overhears their conversation. While the father is showing his younger son how to fish trout, he tells him that "some cultural programs set up under the NMCA could provide opportunities for cultural learning between Elders and youth. These programs would support the documentation of Cree place names and the stories and traditional activities connected to those places. Such cultural programs could see Cree youth paired with professionals, such as archaeologists, researchers, and other professionals, with training and field experience out in the Bay. This could provide Cree youth with opportunities to learn about new career paths and new ways of understanding their own culture."

The Sunday morning walk of our two friends continues (in **sheet 3**). Kaya asks: "Nomshoom, would the national marine conservation area provide economic benefits for our community?"

He replies: "Yes, the NMCA could provide opportunities for sustainable development projects. You and your friends one day may be the ones protecting the marine environment."

Our two friends project themselves in the future. Kaya imagines that visitors spend their summer vacation in a campground created for that purpose. Some of them are kayaking in the Bay, discovering the Cree waters, fauna, and flora.

A young Cree saying: "My favourite part of working as a Cree ecotourism guide is that I get to share Cree culture and the beauty of the marine area with visitors".

On a boat, a fisherman complains about the geese not coming in big numbers like they used to. He says: "the NMCA would help us, Crees, protect and monitor species and habitats that are important for our traditional activities".

On another boat, a tour guide tells visitors: "We shared our knowledge with Parks Canada and researchers. Our knowledge exchange can support the monitoring of fish reproduction cycles and their habitat, especially with climate change".

Nomshoom continues with his explanations: "Guided by Cree principles and leadership, the NMCA would host projects could be carried out with respect towards nature and culture and ultimately lead to tourism, guardianship, research, and monitoring, and support potential economic spin-offs in the communities".

**(Sheet 4)** Our final story is about the marine ecosystem and the circles of life in Eeyou Istchee.

Kaya and Nomshoom are represented on a smaller scale to show that their place in the world is the same as other species.

Kaya asks: "How can the environment be better protected? In what way is a NMCA beneficial for us Crees, and for animals and plants?"

Nomshoom replies wisely and in his reply lies the way Crees envision the environment. He says: "Protecting habitats and wildlife is essential to protecting the Cree way of life. Nature, water, fish, plants, and trees don't have a voice. We humans speak, and it is our responsibility to give nature a voice. We are part of the ecosystem, and the health of our environment and well-being is interconnected. If nature is well, so are we!"

For the Crees, the marine area serves as a space of respectful coexistence among people, flora, and fauna. Based on a program of management, monitoring, research, and knowledge exchange, a NMCA would consolidate the Cree approach in the protection of nature.

Kaya imagines a young Cree saying to a group of visitors: "I am taking part in a research project on fish populations. My dream is to become a marine biologist to help understand the changes to the environment and to help restore and monitor marine areas".

And a young tallyman saying: "The NMCA created job and training opportunities such as the guardian program. As a trained guardian, I am using what I've learned from my father, who is a coastal tallyman, to help safeguard marine habitats and wildlife in the marine area".

In sum, what these stories tell us is that a NMCA, if adopted, would support the Cree leadership in the protection of the marine environment, and in promoting their culture and their way of life.



## 7. ANNEX C

### GUIDING QUESTIONS USED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP

#### Management (Sheet 1)

QUESTIONS	TARGET AUDIENCE			
	Youth	Tallymen, hunters, key land users	Economic dev. staff, corporations, entrepreneurs	Women
1. What are your thoughts on the idea of a NMCA? Is it a good idea? Not a good idea?	X	X	X	X
2. A NMCA could represent an opportunity to incorporate multiple types of knowledge, including traditional knowledge and western science; what are your thoughts on this?		X	X	X
3. Who do you think should be involved in a NMCA, if it was created?		X	X	X
4. What are your thoughts on the management of an NMCA?		X	X	X
5. Reflecting on the idea of a NMCA, <b>what issues, concerns, opportunities, and aspirations</b> do you envision if it was applied to the Eeyou Marine Region?	X	X	X	X

#### Culture (Sheet 2)

QUESTIONS	TARGET AUDIENCE			
	Youth	Tallymen, hunters, key land users	Economic dev. staff, corporations, entrepreneurs	Women
1. What are the main factors affecting the protection and promotion of the Cree culture in the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR)?	X	X	X	X
2. What are your thoughts on the influence of an NMCA on the cultural <b>continuation of the Cree way of life</b> ?	X	X	X	X
3. <b>What would a NMCA need to align with Cree values?</b>				
4. In your opinion, how could an NMCA support the Cree in the <b>preservation and promotion</b> of their Indigenous knowledge?	X	X	X	X
5. What should a NMCA include to ensure that it <b>protects places</b> of great cultural and ecological value?	X	X	X	X
6. In what ways might an NMCA <b>create a challenge for conservation and cultural continuation</b> ?	X	X	X	X

### Opportunities (Sheet 3)

QUESTIONS	TARGET AUDIENCE			
	Youth	Tallymen, hunters, key land users	Economic dev. staff, corporations, entrepreneurs	Women
1. What are the main factors affecting economic development in the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR)?	x	X	X	X
2. How could a NMCA contribute to local economic development that specifically benefits the Cree communities and businesses?	x	X	X	X
3. Is there a type of opportunities, jobs, development projects and/or programs we should be focusing on in an NMCA?	X	X	X	X
4. In your opinion, how would it affect tourism? Do you see potential for a NMCA to be a contributing factor or a challenge to the development of ecotourism/Indigenous tourism considering that it highlights the Eeyou Marine region?	x	x	X	X
5. What economic activities do you think a NMCA could help strengthen or improve: ex. marine tourism industry, hunting and fishing, aquaculture, guardianship, research, etc.?	x	X	X	X
6. How could a NMCA help in creating jobs?	x	X	X	X
7. The NMCA could be a tool for developing partnerships among the Cree communities and with external institutions and businesses; what are your thoughts on this?		x	X	x
8. What economic challenges would you foresee if a NMCA was put in place for the Eeyou Marine Region? What economic activities do you think an NMCA would impact or harm?	x	X	X	X
9. Can you provide further details on any aspirations you have for developing activities, industries, or economic ventures that may intersect with activities restricted within an NMCA?		X	X	X
10. Can you provide further details on any aspirations you have for developing fisheries or other businesses like wind power or aquaculture?		X	X	X

### Ecosystems (Sheet 4)

QUESTIONS	TARGET AUDIENCE			
	Youth	Tallymen, hunters, key land users	Economic dev. staff, corporations, entrepreneurs	Women
1. What are the main factors affecting wildlife and its habitat in the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR)?	X	X	x	x
2. What are the specific actions that could help protect wildlife and its habitat in the EMR?	x	X	x	x
3. What impacts might the NMCA have on wildlife and its habitat that affect hunting and fishing in particular?	x	X	x	x
4. Do you think a NMCA could contribute to efforts to identify, monitor, and protect species at risk? If so, how?	x	X	x	x
5. What wildlife species that are essential to the Crees should be considered in NMCA planning and management?	x	X	x	x
6. How could a NMCA encourage green, sustainable technologies and best practices within the region?	x	X	X	X

# CONCLUSION

In general, the communities support the NMCA project as an initiative that could help sustain both Wiinipaakw and the Cree culture and way of life. Throughout the workshop, information sessions, and engagement sessions, Cree community members and leadership repeatedly addressed several key themes, as explained below:

## **Preservation and Promotion of the Cree Way of Life, Culture, and Language**

For participants in the engagement activities, it is essential that an NMCA contributes to the preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life and Cree culture, while also promoting Cree leadership. They also considered that the NMCA would be an excellent way to help restore and consolidate the connection between Crees (especially younger Crees) and the land, while also providing opportunities to document and transfer traditional cultural knowledge. Participants also argued that the NMCA could lead to educational, training, and cultural programs, especially for youth. Finally, an NMCA would provide tools that would allow the Crees to better manage where visitors go and what activities they can do, so as to ensure that traditional Cree activities are not disrupted.

## **Access and Safe Travels to Offshore Waters and Islands**

The decreasing relationship between the Crees and the islands in the Bay was mentioned by many. In fact, participants across all communities referred to the issue of the increasing cost of accessing and travelling to offshore waters and islands, affecting traditional practices on the water. They also spoke about the need to increase the capacity and training of local marine search and rescue, especially considering the impact of climate change on traditional travel routes and knowledge. Finally, participants spoke about the need to improve safety on the water.

## **Food Security: Traditional and New Food Sources**

Food security was another concern for participants, although many were optimistic that an NMCA could be a valuable tool in increasing food security. It is important for participants to sustain currently existing ecosystems and species, especially given the impacts of climate change. Additionally, participants argued that an NMCA could help the Crees identify potential new species to be harvested or fished for sustainability.

## **Tourism and Other Job Opportunities**

Participants across all communities and engagement activities viewed the NMCA as a tool to create meaningful employment in tourism and other industries. One of the major benefits, as expressed by participants, was that there would be well-paying jobs located in their communities, rather than in cities in the south like Ottawa or Montréal. There was interest in jobs as Guardians, tour guides, marine technicians, marine biologists, search and rescue workers, commercial fisheries, and more. Participants also argued that such jobs would contribute to monitoring efforts, including fish movements, bird migration patterns, climate change impacts, and ecosystems. The youth were particularly interested in the training opportunities that would be created through an NMCA to prepare them for these new jobs.

## **Coastal Marine Protection: An Important Preoccupation of Crees**

Cree community members emphasized the importance of the coastal area for the Cree culture and way of life, as well as for food security. The Crees have observed many changes in the landscape due to environmental changes over the last few decades. These changes have led to reduced access to travel routes and areas that are available for hunting, fishing, and harvesting. Participants wanted to increase monitoring and protection of the coastal area and ensure that it remains a strong link between the terrestrial protected areas and the water in the bay.

### **Concerns**

Beyond the positive comments and strong support for the NMCA, participants in all engagement activities brought up several concerns largely centred on tourism and safety.

Some participants were worried about the impacts of increased tourism. However, this concern became much less pronounced as the engagement activities continued and tools available to manage this were explained. With more information, most participants were ready to embrace the economic benefits of tourism in the bay and argued that, given the support of an NMCA, they would have enough tools to adequately control tourism and regulate tourist behaviour.

The other major concern that participants shared was that of safety and security on the water. Older land users worried that even young Crees might end up in life-threatening situations without proper guidance and safety measures. Participants also insisted on the importance of properly guiding and educating potential tourists and ensuring that they are accompanied by Cree guides to ensure their safety.

Participants also asked questions about governance, management, and funding. Namely, they wanted to know who would be responsible for the NMCA and were unsure if the funding from the Federal government would be sustainable and long-term. Some participants were worried about the timeline of the NMCA and the next steps and feared that it would take a long time to implement. Finally, participants wished that the name of James Bay could be replaced by the ancestral Cree name, Wiinipaakw.

### **Going forward**

In conclusion, participants in the various engagement activities were supportive of the NMCA project. Although some concerns were expressed, everyone agreed that the project should go through and move forward as promptly as possible into the negotiation stage.

It is important that negotiations take into account the concerns expressed by community members throughout the entire process, and that an agreement can be put in place that adequately responds to these concerns and mitigates them as much as possible. It is also recommended to continue engagement activities with community members throughout the negotiation stage of the project to ensure that they remain aware of the project and that they can express any new concerns that might come up following further reflection.

Support for the establishment of an NMCA in the eastern James Bay is still very high in all five coastal communities, and participants were excited about the opportunities that could be created through the project.