



PRESS RELEASE
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QUEBEC EXPORT OF ELECTRICITY TO THE UNITED STATES

The moment of truth for Pessamit and Wemotaci First Nations

QUEBEC CITY, August 5, 2020 – The Canadian Innu First Nation of Pessamit and the Atikamekw First Nation of Wemotaci (Province of Quebec) are joining forces to put an end to the stranglehold of the Quebec government and Hydro-Québec on their traditional territories. They mean to obtain compensation for production facilities, reservoirs and transmission lines set up without their consent by threatening to derail a project to run a high-voltage transmission line through Maine to Massachusetts.

Currently, 36% of the total hydroelectric power installed by Hydro-Québec comes from Innu, Atikamekw and Anishnabeg traditional territories, protected by ancestral and treaty rights that have never been respected. In total, 33 production structures, 130 dams and dikes, 10,400 km² of reservoirs, tens of thousands of kilometres of transmission, distribution and road lines have been illegally installed. These facilities continue to be operated by Hydro-Québec in violation of the rights recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982 and the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of Canada.

At the Cost of Others

For nearly a century, six Innu, Atikamekw and Anishnabeg communities have borne the brunt of successive hydroelectric developments that have allowed Quebec to industrialize and the majority of its citizens to access a better quality of life. Conversely, these successive and massive hydroelectric developments on their traditional territories have never translated into a better quality of life for the members of the communities most directly and negatively impacted. Quite the contrary! All internationally recognized well-being indicators are largely unfavourable for them compared to the entire population of Quebec and are comparable to those of third world countries.

A Suspended Sentence

The most recent legal episode in the Quebec government's crusade to evade the ancestral rights of the First Nations ended in 1996. The Supreme Court of Canada then definitively put an end to Quebec's claims that First Nations had no ancestral rights over the territory of the province. The illegitimate position of the government of Quebec nevertheless gave it enough time to de facto dispossess First Nations of their traditional territories. This rejection in the Supreme Court did not, however, convince Quebec to apply the necessary corrective measures. Since then, successive provincial governments have embarked on a strategy of perpetually delaying enforcement of the Supreme Court ruling. In doing so, Quebec scandalously self-awarded itself a suspended sentence.

Sand in the Gears

According to Chiefs René Simon of Pessamit and François Néashit of Wemotaci: "The First Nations directly affected by the odious regime imposed by Quebec with the complicity of the government of Canada, now have an important lever capable of establishing the rule of law, right where state brutality has always prevailed. Now is the time for our two communities to put up a concerted resistance to what is morally, legally and constitutionally indefensible! We intend to come down directly on the revenues that the government and Hydro-Québec expect to generate with their project to run a high-voltage line with a capacity of 1200 MW through the northeast of the United States." It should be remembered in this regard that Hydro-Québec has a significant energy surplus that

cannot be absorbed by internal consumption. From a business standpoint, then, it's no wonder that the crown corporation is looking to improve its performance by selling power in the northeastern US. In this context, the weakening of the profit objective imposed by the state-owned company in its five-year 2020 to 2024 plan (\$16.1 billion) could have the consequence of encouraging Quebec to review its position regarding First Nations.

The Route Through Maine

Hydro-Québec's intentions in the United States are far from being unanimously supported there. In 2018, when Hydro-Québec was awarded the contract to deliver 9.45 TWh of energy to Massachusetts via the *Northern Pass* transmission line that was to cross New Hampshire from North to South, the Innu First Nation of Pessamit closely coordinated its action with regulatory bodies and American opponents of this project. Pessamit then assumed a leading role with the American media and various non-Native and Native American political bodies. In July 2019, after having exhausted all its legal options, the promoter saw its project definitively rejected by the Supreme Court of New Hampshire. Pessamit was instrumental in the termination of *Northern Pass*. After this resounding and still very recent failure, Hydro-Québec is now banking on the New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project to honour its contract with Massachusetts. The state-owned company plans to run its electricity through Maine instead of New Hampshire, in order to reach Massachusetts. But history could repeat itself.

What We Are Demanding

Our First Nations cannot allow Hydro-Québec to financially benefit from our heritage without openly taking part in the debate in Maine about NECEC. After a century of denial on the part of the Quebec government, our communities have an unexpected opportunity to see our rights on their ancestral territories respected. We will resolutely seize this opportunity to force the settlement that has always been denied. The government of Quebec and Hydro-Québec have never had and still do not have the moral and constitutional legitimacy to operate 33 of the 63 hydroelectric production structures since they have never consulted and compensated the First Nations concerned. They have even less right to sell electricity in the United States when 13,200 MW, or 36% of the installed capacity in Quebec out of a total of 36,700 MW, has been usurped from the said First Nations. And if the government turns a deaf ear, Pessamit and Wemotaci will do their utmost to derail the project and ensure a resounding NO to NECEC!

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