



A Model of Engagement - The Berger Inquiry, 25 Years Later

August 30, 2002 – In 1974, the federal government appointed Justice Thomas Berger to head up the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. Justice Berger was to consider the social, environmental and economic impact of a gas pipeline and energy corridor from the Western Arctic up the Mackenzie Valley to Alberta and beyond. Awaiting his conclusions, were the proponents of the largest megaproject in Canadian history, the giants of the North American oil industry.

The government made no attempt to tell Berger how to conduct his inquiry. In fact, he might have undertaken the task, in the manner of National Energy Board hearings at that time, from the comfort of well-appointed hearing rooms in Ottawa, Calgary and perhaps Yellowknife. But that wasn't the judge's choice. He consulted widely with all interested parties and decided subsequently to take his inquiry into every affected community in the Northwest Territories, remote village after remote village, in addition to the major centres of the South.

What followed was a remarkable example of public engagement that set a standard that has not been matched since. The outcome was a report and recommendations that have shaped the political, social and economic progress of the NWT ever since and with ramifications for the country as a whole.

In June, 2002, the Living History Society of the NWT organized a national symposium to take stock on the 25th anniversary of Justice Berger's report. CPRN's Director of Public Affairs, Peter Puxley, was the research advisor to the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT (now the Dene Nation) during the 1970s and a participant in this year's symposium. In his contribution to an anthology of reflections on the Berger Inquiry, he explains what made that endeavour such a success and why it remains a model for today.

You can access or download his paper, A Model of Engagement: Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of the Berger Report, by clicking here.

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