

C ROLE OF THE GNWT IN ENERGY RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The increased economic value of hydrocarbon and mineral resources throughout the 1970's generally and the National Energy Program specifically changed the basic economic structure of the NWT. The economy has moved from one based primarily on renewable resource harvesting to one relying much more heavily on the non-renewable resource sector. While hydrocarbon and resource prices are generally depressed for the moment it can be expected that population and per capita income growth will continue worldwide and that this will create continued upward pressure on limited resources.

Northern resource development will be massive by traditional standards. Each potential project - Beaufort, Norman Wells, Arctic Pilot Project, Polar Gas and Slave River Hydro Developments - has been called a mega project in its own right. Such projects could provide tremendous opportunities for northerners. These projects could also seriously damage the socio-economic fabric of northern lifestyles, and the natural environment on which these lifestyles depend. Clearly northerners must be given the opportunity to participate in resource development but they must also have the choice of pursuing traditional activities. The opportunity to follow traditional pursuits cannot be compromised by resource development activities.

The GNWT's goal is to increase its influence over resource developments so that northerners can have an effective voice in determining what the north of tomorrow will be like and to benefit from resource development.

The National Energy Program, in particular Bill C-48, was of great concern to the GNWT. The former Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Honourable Richard Nerysoo, summed up GNWT sentiments on Bill C-48 when he spoke to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Public Works in Ottawa on April 2, 1984:

"Bill C-48 would hamstring further constitutional development in the NWT. The bill firmly reserves the benefits of all oil and gas resources to the control and benefit of the Federal Government...the entire NWT - mainland and islands, underground and underwater."

Generally speaking, the National Energy Program may have slowed down constitutional development but at the same time it caused the GNWT to examine its role in the resource development process carefully. Where Federal legislation and mandate was clear, the GNWT demanded the right to participate. Where there were gaps in Federal mandate, the GNWT moved to fill them with their own policies. The GNWT has a long way to go before reaching a satisfactory level of control over resource development but it has made some notable progress including the Resource Development Policy, a Resource Management and Revenue Sharing Proposal, Renewable Resource Compensation Policy and the Energy Policy.

The following list of initiatives provides a clear indication of the GNWT goal of obtaining a reasonable level of regulatory and management control over the development of resource and energy related projects.