



Photo: Mesgi'g Ugju's'n

Highlights

Targeted Consultation and Inquiry Report

Report No. 376

Mesgi'g Ugju's'n 2 Wind Farm Project in the D'Avignon MRC

June 2024



INFORMER



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Background to the BAPE Mandate

On February 13, 2024, the Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs, Benoit Charette, entrusted the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) with a mandate to investigate and hold targeted consultations on the Mesgi'g Ugju's'n 2 Wind Farm Project on the unorganized Rivière-Nouvelle territory by Parc éolien Mesgi'g Ugju's'n 2 (MU2) s.e.c. In his letter, the Minister indicated that this consultation would have to specifically target the issues surrounding the questions and concerns that had been transmitted to him, namely the consideration of cumulative effects on wildlife habitats, the dismantling of the wind farm and the effects of infrasound and low-frequency noise on wildlife. BAPE president Alain R. Roy therefore appointed a Commission of Inquiry, which began its mandate on March 11, 2024, for a maximum period of three months.

The Project

Mesgi'g Ugju's'n 2 (MU2) L.P., the project initiator, is the result of an equal partnership between the Mi'gmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation (MMBC) and Innergex énergie renouvelable inc. (Innergex). MMBC is an organization created by the three Mi'gmaq communities of the Gaspé Peninsula, Gesgapegiag, Gespeg and Listuguj, while Innergex is a renewable energy company active in several countries.

The proponent is proposing the creation of the MU2 wind farm, comprising up to 24 turbines with a total capacity of 102.24 MW. This project was selected by Hydro-Québec as part of the call for tenders issued in March 2023 for the purchase of 480 MW of renewable energy from various sources.

The turbines would be installed on the periphery of an existing wind farm, Mesgi'g Ugju's'n (MU1), on public lands in the unorganized territory of Rivière-Nouvelle, all of which are located in forested areas and form part of Gespe'gewa'gi, the traditional Mi'gmaq territory. The MU2 project would have a footprint of up to 109.5 ha.

The project would be divided into three phases: construction, operation, and decommissioning. Under the terms of the supply contract with Hydro-Québec, the operating phase would last 30 years.

The estimated cost of the project is \$250 million. MMBC's share of net profits from the operation of the MU2 wind farm would be distributed among the three Mi'gmaq communities of the Gaspé Peninsula. The MRC d'Avignon would receive an annual royalty of \$5,700 per MW and an amount of \$500 per MW as a social commitment fund, while the Québec government would receive an annual rent of \$648,099, since the wind farm is located on public land. Construction of the wind farm is scheduled to begin in 2024, with commercial commissioning planned for December 2026 at the latest.

Information and Consultation Activities

The Commission of Inquiry held a public meeting in Pointe-à-la-Croix on March 12, 2024. This session was an opportunity for the initiator and resource people from various government departments to answer questions from the public and the commission. It also allowed participants to express their opinions on the project. In all, the commission received eight briefs, three of which were presented at the meeting, and two comments, plus one oral presentation.

Public Opinions and Concerns

Several organizations supported the project, citing the economic and social benefits it would generate for the region and the community. They also emphasized the initiator's efforts to ensure that the project would coexist harmoniously with other land uses, and to maintain good relations with host communities. Some of these organizations maintain that the production of electricity from a renewable source is an advantageous way of pursuing the government's objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, some question the need to increase electricity production, given Quebec's poor energy consumption habits. Others are concerned about the impact of low-frequency noise and infrasound on animals and humans.

The Commission's Main Findings and Opinions

The main findings and opinions of the Commission of Inquiry concern the consultation targets set out by the Minister. Before the government authorizes this project, certain aspects need to be considered.

Effects of Wind Turbine Noise on Wildlife

Noise from wind turbines, like that from other anthropogenic sources, can disturb wildlife by inducing, for example, displacement or avoidance behaviour in certain species. Although the specific effects of infrasound and low-frequency sound on fauna are poorly documented, their sensitivity to man-made noise is well documented. Considering that wind turbines emit sound over a wide frequency spectrum, the commission is of the opinion that undesirable effects on the fauna frequenting the MU2 wind farm are possible. Consequently, it is of the opinion that the Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP) should monitor the effects of wind farm noise on wildlife, including infrasound and low-frequency sounds.

Cumulative Effects

In Quebec, resident bat populations have declined by over 95% as a result of white-nose syndrome. In this context, mortality due to collision with wind turbines or barotrauma represents a serious threat to the recovery of these species. Mortality linked to wind farm development could also compromise the survival of migratory species.

In view of the precariousness of resident bat populations and the sensitivity of migratory bats to wind power development, the Commission of Inquiry is of the opinion that the MELCCFP should require the application of its flanging measure to the MU2 wind farm.

Dismantling

The metal parts of a wind turbine, which make up over 90% of its weight, can be recycled through existing channels. However, wind turbine blades present a particular challenge, as they are generally made from an assembly of fiberglass, carbon fiber, and epoxy resin. They are currently destined for landfill, in the absence of commercially available alternatives in Quebec. Consequently, the Commission of Inquiry is of the opinion that the MELCCFP, in collaboration with Recyc-Québec and wind turbine manufacturers in Quebec, should establish requirements for materials used in the manufacture of wind turbine blades, with the aim of encouraging, if not promoting, a rigorous application of the 3RV-E hierarchy and a model based on the circular economy when these blades reach the end of their useful life.