Challenges in the Use of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge in EIA

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Traditional Knowledge (TK)

- TK is Promoted in EIA in Canada
  - CEAA, MVEIRB, NIRB
- System of knowledge, values and beliefs
- Passed across generations
- Area specific
- Used in EIAs of several major projects
- Challenging to do well

Who Are the TK Holders?

- Many but not all TK holders are elders, and not all elders are TK holders
  - Some TK holders are younger
  - Some elders have particular areas of specialty
- Credentials of scientific experts considered when presenting opinion evidence
- Credentials of TK holders should also be considered
- Challenging to do this in a culturally appropriate manner

Separating TK and Community Based Knowledge

- Community-based knowledge
  - is gained from direct experience with the land
  - is not strictly Aboriginal
  - Good for detailed changes over short periods
- Traditional Knowledge
  - Dynamic, but spans generations
  - “survival tested”
  - Transcends scientific field study- valuable for long term trends
- Often confused, but useful in EIA in different ways

TK and Objectivity

- Most TK often from communities nearer to project area
- Nearby communities have greatest interest in EIA outcome
- Many EIAs support community compensation related to impacts
- Experts, traditional or otherwise, must be objective

Conflicting Evidence

- TK evidence can conflict with other TK evidence or scientific evidence
  - e.g. competing claims of greater traditional use of an area
- Difficult to weigh TK vs science - apples and oranges
- Difficult to weigh TK vs TK- no normative model for comparison

Conclusions

- TK can be valuable and influential in EIA
- Area-specific nature of TK makes it hard to establish objectivity
- Distinction between TK and community-based knowledge is important
- Need for approaches to deal w. conflicting evidence
- Credibility of TK holders important yet difficult to establish