

# DRAFT

## Regional Assessment of the St. Lawrence River Area

### Public Comment Period on the Draft Terms of Reference

### What We Heard Summary

The Regional Assessment of the St. Lawrence River Area (SLRA) will be conducted by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) in partnership with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (MCK) and other interested First Nations in the area. An IAAC-MCK led Regional Assessment Working Group (RAWG) consisting of representatives from IAAC and First Nation partners will be responsible for planning the SLRA and for ensuring that the deliverables outlined in the final Terms of Reference are achieved.

The SLRA's goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of the St. Lawrence River by assessing the relationships between targeted physical activities, complementary activities, and the ecosystems within which they occur. By considering Indigenous Knowledge and Western science, the RAWG will establish a set of baseline and targeted conditions to better evaluate the effects of activities (past, existing and future). This set of conditions will help to identify strategies for these activities and other efforts to achieve environmental and social gains that improve upon present-day conditions in an efficient, collaborative manner and help streamline the information collection process for project assessments as well as support better scope definition.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the comments, views and opinions expressed during the 30-day [Draft Terms of Reference](#) (TOR) public comment period, which took place from February 27 to March 29, 2025.

### The Public Comment Period

During the 30-day public comment period, the draft TOR was posted so that Indigenous Peoples, communities and organizations, federal and provincial governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), and members of the public could submit their input on the document. The comments were received by emails, Registry submissions, and virtual public sessions. Each submission was reviewed and comments categorized according to themes and relevance to specific sections of the TOR.

Multiple engagement opportunities were offered prior to and throughout the public comment period to enhance awareness and to improve comprehension of the SLRA, the TOR, and the regional assessment process in general. These activities (presented in both official languages) included:

- Two virtual public information sessions (March 17 and 19, 2025)
- Information sessions with federal authorities and stakeholders upon request
- Update emails to the distribution list

- Posted relevant information to the Registry

Approximately 260 comments (from 28 submissions) were received from Indigenous Peoples and organizations, NGOs, Federal Authorities, academics, and individuals.

## Summary of Feedback

The following is a summary of the feedback received.

### 1. General Information

- Suggestions for minor wording changes to further clarify statements within the TOR.
- Information and resources shared by multiple stakeholders for consideration during the conduct phase.

### 2. Scope and Priorities of the Assessment

- Overall positive feedback about the assessment area outlined, although some suggestions were received to either increase or decrease this area.
- Overall support for the assessment objectives and priorities outlined in the TOR. Some suggested adding additional assessment priorities or further describe each priority.
- Concerns expressed about the RAWG's and IAAC's capacity to meet the terms of the SLRA's mandate within the proposed timeline (specifically with regards to the cumulative effects assessment).
- The need to include specific relevant activities in the regional assessment was expressed. Also, they raised the importance of considering specific impacts of past, present, and future activities, including federal, provincial, and municipal projects.
- Importance of considering the ecological, social & cultural value of the river during the SLRA was underlined, while others stressed the importance of documenting its economic value.

### 3. Indigenous Involvement & Concerns

- Positive views on the SLRA being conducted by IAAC in partnership with MCK and 8 other First Nations were expressed, as well as the RAWG being comprised of representatives of the First Nation partners so that their perspectives are being meaningfully considered.
- Ensuring opportunities for non-partner Indigenous communities to be involved.
- The importance of gathering Indigenous Knowledge and ensuring it is meaningfully included throughout the SLRA was highlighted.

#### 4. Public Participation

- The importance of ensuring broad and meaningful participation from the public and Indigenous communities throughout the assessment was stressed.
- A comprehensive plan outlining the proposed process for public participation, including the objectives for advisory groups and other methods of public involvement (refer to FAQ #4) was asked.
- Emphasis on the importance of supporting and funding of public participation within the SLRA.

#### 5. Information and Data

- Using historical data to more accurately define baseline conditions and historical impacts, thereby enhancing the comprehension of cumulative effects was suggested.
- Importance was placed on ensuring that all information and data gathered (excluding Indigenous Knowledge privy to confidentiality concerns) should be made publicly available (see FAQ #3).
- Widespread participation from Indigenous communities and various stakeholder groups, such as federal departments, universities, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and the public was suggested (see FAQ #4).

## FAQs

Several questions on the SLRA and its process were received. To provide further clarity, below is an overview of these questions, along with answers.

### ***1. How will the SLRA's recommendations be applied to other federal departments and provincial government?***

IAAC intends to use regional assessments to inform the process and decision-making on components of federal jurisdiction in impact assessments. While the recommendations included in the SLRA final report will not be binding, IAAC will not make recommendations on activities of provincial jurisdiction in its final report. As for recommendations on federal activities relevant to other Federal Authorities, early engagement with them is expected to foster constructive dialogue which could be translated into improving environmental, health, social and economic conditions.

“Complementary activities” are considered to allow for a better understanding of the cumulative effects and multiple pathways of effects that may affect components of federal jurisdiction in the assessment area of the St. Lawrence River. This approach will allow IAAC to assess projects' adverse effects within federal jurisdiction.

**2. Will the SLRA result in the exclusion of future projects within the assessment area from the impact assessment process?**

Under the *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA), the Minister of Environment has the authority to make regulations that exclude certain physical activities from federal impact assessment processes, provided a regional assessment has been completed and considered for that region. Currently, such exclusions can only be applied to the physical activities referred to in sections 34 (offshore exploratory oil and gas wells), 44 and 45 (offshore wind power generating facility of 10 or more wind turbines) of the *Physical Activities Regulations*.

**3. Can any participants provide data/information for this initiative? Will information and data gathered during the assessment be publicly available?**

According to section 100 of the IAA, every federal authority in possession of specialist or expert information or knowledge with respect to the physical activities subject to a regional assessment must, on request, make that information or knowledge available to IAAC within the specified period. When federal authorities provide this information, IAAC will ensure it is posted on the Registry.

The submission of information by the public, non-governmental organizations or researchers is voluntary and strongly encouraged and can be done by sending an email to [stlawrence-saintlaurent@iaac-aeic.gc.ca](mailto:stlawrence-saintlaurent@iaac-aeic.gc.ca) and/or using the public [commenting tool on the Registry](#).

The RAWG is committed to use publicly available information & data throughout the assessment. All resources will be shared (subject to confidentiality) as the assessment progresses, either through the Registry or other information sharing platforms, if the RAWG decides to implement one.

**4. Who will be allowed to participate in the regional assessment?**

Participation is open to all. The RAWG encourages participants to share SLRA information with potentially interested participants, to help ensure widespread participation throughout the assessment. Participation in the SLRA may take several forms such as, but not limited to, receiving email updates, submitting comments, providing information/data, participating in advisory groups, attending information sessions etc. Participants can apply to IAAC's Participant Funding Program (PFP) to help fund their participation within the SLRA, otherwise, participation is completely voluntary.

For further details on RAWG participation opportunities, please refer to the Participation Plan once posted online. This document will be updated as required during the assessment.

**5. Will the conduct of the regional assessment affect the timelines of current (or future) impact assessments in the area?**

Completed regional assessments must be considered in project-specific impact assessments and should help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of future federal impact assessment processes and decisions. However, it is important to note that impact assessments of specific projects proceed in accordance with their legislative time limits, and separately from regional

assessment timelines. Current or future impact assessments timelines for projects in the area will not be impacted by the conduct of the SLRA.

**6. *Does the working group have the same powers of an inquiry commission?***

As specified in section 101 of the IAA, only a committee established for the purpose of conducting a regional assessment will have the power to summon witness referred to in section 53 of the IAA. Therefore, neither IAAC nor the RAWG will have the same power. Except in the case where there is an obligation for federal authorities, all information/data/expertise/knowledge provided to IAAC or the RAWG will be provided willingly by the holder of that information/data/expertise/knowledge.

## **Next Steps**

The SLRA will begin its conduct phase in the following months, for a period of 30 months. For additional details on ways to participate and other planned engagement opportunities, please refer to the Participation Plan and the [SLRA Registry page](#).

If you have any questions or require further information, please email us at the following address: [stlawrence-saintlaurent@iaac-aeic.gc.ca](mailto:stlawrence-saintlaurent@iaac-aeic.gc.ca).