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Jeff Philipp
Founder and CEO
SSi Micro Ltd.
356B Old Airport Road
Yellowknife, NT Canada,
X1A-3T4

Sent via email

Re: NIRB Letter of Support for SSi Connect to Innovate program application

Dear Mr. Philipp:

The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) works with our staff of 25 people based in Cambridge Bay (with a small satellite office in Arviat) to conduct assessments and gather community input through our screening, review and monitoring processes for proposed projects in Nunavut.

We have worked around limited bandwidth and slow Internet speeds for many, many years. We have designed internal and online systems around these limitations, however it has a real impact on our success as an organization.

With significant investment into backbone bandwidth as proposed in your application to the Connect to Innovate program, we are hopeful that we will be able to purchase the services we require as we work to fulfill our mandate.

Who we are

The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) is an institution of public government created by the Nunavut Agreement to assess the potential impacts of proposed development in the Nunavut Settlement Area prior to approval of the required government authorizations. Using both traditional knowledge and recognized scientific methods, the NIRB assesses the potential biophysical and socio-economic impact of proposals and will make determinations about which projects may proceed, and how. The Board may also establish monitoring programs for projects that have been assessed and approved to proceed.

In our role, we conduct extensive consultations with Nunavummiut in all regions of Nunavut. We also gather and make available large amounts of data from project proponents, various levels of government, non-governmental organizations and the general public.

While out of necessity we have been functioning with our current levels of connectivity, there is much more that we could achieve with a better communications infrastructure backbone to better fulfill our mandate.

From a communications technology perspective, NIRB (and others involved in assessment and monitoring roles in Nunavut) would make use of many services that rely on a stronger broadband backbone.

Office requirements

We currently rely on our QINIQ connection at our offices in Cambridge Bay, as well as during travel into all communities in Nunavut. For our office of 25 we have one QINIQ modem with a 50 GB cap, which is only possible because of significant investment into a proxy server to direct our Internet traffic.

By law, our organization must maintain an online public registry. We must have the ability to transfer large files, respond to queries at all times, and be able to conduct research. Improving speeds and GB caps would be of great benefit to our operations.

Audio-video streaming for public events

NIRB holds 6-10 public events a year – many of which affect multiple communities in a region. Many of our events have national significance.

One of our key events in a multi-year review process for a major project such as a large mine, is the “Final Hearing”, where all participants in the assessment physically come together to discuss the proposed project in the most potentially-impacted community. These final hearings are formal, like a court, with ordered speaking, swearing in of witnesses and cross-examinations.

At this time, the communications infrastructure available to our organization will not support live streaming of our proceedings. Our hearings take place in affected communities all over Nunavut – from Kugluktuk, Baker Lake, Rankin Inlet, and Repulse Bay to Pangnirtung and Pond Inlet — virtually anywhere a major project is proposed. In order to consider developing and investing in this type of equipment, expertise and service, we must know that every Nunavut community can access the necessary bandwidth to both stream and receive the proceedings.

To be able to offer interested parties and the public better access to our proceedings via audio-video streaming would be extremely helpful at all stages of our screening, review and monitoring processes.

Videoconferencing

Currently, we are unable to provide services to the public that comparable agencies in "the South" are able to provide, such as videoconferencing.

Intervenors, government representatives, and community members in adjacent communities are required to fly into affected communities multiple times over the course of a review. Bad weather, constrained budgets, and timing sometimes mean that participants are challenged to be physically present. Access to affordable, reliable videoconferencing options would be a major step forward in improving our ability to include all necessary parties in the various stages of consultation.

Monitoring devices

Projects that are approved by NIRB have to meet the terms and conditions set out in the NIRB's Screening Decision Reports and Project Certificates. Various licensing bodies also have responsibilities to enforce compliance with terms and conditions contained within the NIRB's Screening Decision Reports and Project Certificates. All projects are monitored with a variety of reporting and inspections to ensure they meet their obligations.

With a better backbone infrastructure, major projects could be required to send data to licensing bodies via monitoring devices in certain circumstances – including data, video, and images. It would provide another tool for ensuring environmental protection in the monitoring phase of a project.

In Conclusion

The NIRB's role in conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) is an important step in managing Nunavut's future development.

A strong and reliable communications infrastructure is very important to our work.

We thank SSi for your efforts to date, and wish you success in obtaining support to improve Nunavut's backbone infrastructure for the entire Nunavut Settlement Area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ryan Barry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Ryan Barry
Executive Director
Nunavut Impact Review Board