Inuit want second chance for Back River mine

Kitikmeot Inuit Association and Nunavut Government challenge NIRB stance on Back River mine project

by Beth Brown Kitikmeot

The Kitikmeot Inuit Association and residents of Kugluktuk are requesting that Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett ask the Nunavut Impact Review Board to take another look at a gold mine project it rejected.

The request is in response to the review board's June recommendation to Bennett that a submission by Sabina Gold & Silver Corp. to construct a mine in the Back River area should not be approved for licensing. The board sited environmental concerns, including climate and caribou depletion as grounds for rejection.

Kitikmeot Inuit Association president Stanley Anablak said he was surprised with NIRB's findings after the spring public hearing.

"We thought everything was there that (NIRB) required for the project to move forward," he said. "We didn't see any issues, the government didn't see any issues. The issues that needed to be dealt with were taken care of at the meeting."

An Aug. 24 letter to the minister from the Kitikmeot Inuit Association states that support of the project is "con-

tingent on completion of an Inuit Impact Benefit Agreement, land tenure agreement, and the commitments. terms and agreements jointly developed by KIA and Sabina."

The letter also notes that plans for Sabina to conduct thorough caribou monitoring and ensure environmental mitigation were only finalized in the last day of the public hearing.

"Unfortunately that meant that the board did not have a full airing of these revised plans," the letter states.

A June 15 submission to Bennett by NIRB states, "Due to a high level of uncertainty regarding the efficacy and adaptability of measures designed to mitigate these effects, the board is not confident that these potential adverse ecosystemic and related socio-economic effects could be effectively mitigated over the life of the project."

Sam Tulurialik, chairperson of the Spence Bay Hunters and Trappers Association, stated his support of NIRB's assessments, saying the decision reflects how Inuit people have been mindful of the balance between socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability for generations.

Briefs

A June news release from the World Wildlife Federation called the area a critical habitat, citing a 2015 survey that showed a 50 per cent decline in the Bathurst caribou herd, and in the number of breeding females, since 2012.

But Kitikmeot communities are interested in the economic growth that would result from a new mine.

Kugluktuk elders Tommy Norberg, Alice Ayalik and Mona Tiktalek stated in a letter of support for the mine, dated July 6, to Bennett and NIRB chairperson Elizabeth Copland, "We want the Back River to move forward for jobs and benefits. Please keep the land and water clean for us and our animals ... The project is important to us and our families. The community needs jobs."

Recognizing the wishes of the region Anablak said, "After carefully reviewing NIRB's documents we decided that it was in the best interest of the Kitikmeot for the project to go back to NIRB for review, hopefully to get approval to go forward on this project in regards to employment and training."

While the delay is giving the company time to reassess the lifecycle environmental impact of the project, Gary Vivian, president of the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, stated in an Aug. 13 letter that the screening could hamper expected economic growth.

"The uncertainty created by the NIRB's decision on the Back River Project may lead to significantly reduced investment in exploration which will potentially stifle the growth of Nunavut's minerals industry."

Additionally, he agrees with Anablak in a statement that "the NIRB decision does not align with the evidence presented during the environmental assessment, specifically the conclusions of the subject matter experts and relevant parties at the final public hearings."

Sabina included community consultation as part of its project preparation. The copany stated in an e-mail to Nunavut News/North that, "Responsible mining is not just about money, it is also about leaving a positive impact in the communities of the Kitikmeot region and the North. It is about providing training, employment and contracts at our project while protecting the environment, the land and helping to make peoples' lives better. We believe there are no outstanding concerns with the project that cannot be resolved."

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Kitikmeot Inuit Association president Stanley Anablak has added his voice to those asking for Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett to send the Back River mine project's application back to the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

Should a new public hearing be held, KIA wants to be able to present additional input or arguments.

"We have to start preparing for this, to come forward with a strong statement to NIRB," said Anablak.

In a July 22 letter, the Gov-

ernment of Canada requested input from additional stakeholders by Sept. 6.

The Back River gold belt is about 75 km from tidewater at Bathurst Inlet, 400 km southwest of Cambridge Bay, and plans call for an open-pit mining operation.

Inquest scheduled into infant's death

Northern News Services Kinngait/Cape Dorset

An inquest ordered by then-justice minister Paul Okalik last February into the 2012 death of infant Makibi Olayuk Timilak has been scheduled to take place in Cape Dorset from Nov. 22 to 25. **NEWS**

"Pursuant to the Coroners Act, an inquest's purpose is to determine the identity of the deceased; the date, time and place of death; the cause of death; the manner of death; and, the circumstances

under which the death occurred," stated coroner's lawyer Amy Groothuis in a news release.

Nunavut's chief coroner Padma Suramala appointed Garth Eggenberger of Yellowknife to preside over the inquest. Eggenberger is the former Chief Coroner of the NWT and has presided over a number of coroner's inquests in both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

'The inquest's ultimate goal is to bring out the facts relating to the circumstances of the death in a fair and balanced way and allow the jury to make useful and practical recommendations that may prevent similar deaths," stated Groothuis.

In her independent review report titled A Journey Through Heartache, released in December 2015, retired lawyer Katherine Peterson stated the parents deserve to have a full inquest carried out surrounding the death of their child. Suramala denied requests for an inquest in

"The varying reports of the chief coroner

as to the cause of death of Baby Makibi has

left the community of Cape Dorset uncertain as to the facts, medical opinions, distrustful and angry," Peterson stated in her report.

"Various versions of events at the time have emerged, leaving a situation of conflicting facts. These

conflicting facts and medical opinions are best addressed by a formal inquest in the community regarding the death of Baby Makibi."

- Michele LeTourneau

Shooting death to be examined

Iglulik

Chief coroner Padma Suramala has confirmed a mandatory inquest into the shooting death of Felix Taqqaugaq in Iglulik will go ahead in that community from Nov. 1 to 10.

"The purpose of this inquest is to explore the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Felix Taqquagaq who died in Iglulik on March 20, 2012 following a confrontation with RCMP members," stated Suramala in a news release.

Suramala first announced in April 2015 chief coroner's office. her office would be moving forward with an inquest into Taqqaugaq's death.

Nunavut News/North reported in April 2012 that Taqqaugaq's sister, Louisa Taqqaugaq, said her brother has been schizophrenic since 1998 and had tried committing suicide. She added a family member called the RCMP saying Felix

"He had no gun at his place," said Louisa

Meanwhile, the RCMP had stated an officer checking on the well-being of an adult male, at a home on the evening of March 20, was met by a man wielding a weapon and uttering threats.

Police said they shot the man, who succumbed to his injuries some time later.

The Ottawa Police Service carried out an investigation.

Louisa said that her brother, who was 29 at the time of the shooting, was known by RCMP to be schizophrenic and that "he was shot three times and he had no gun."

The results of the investigation have since been provided to Suramala, who will preside

"The RCMP will fully cooperate with the inquest process," Suramala has previously stated to Nunavut News/North.

Anyone wishing to participate or make a presentation at the inquest may contact the

- Michele LeTourneau

Long night without power

Kimmirut/Lake Harbour

The community of Kimmirut experienced almost 24 hours without electricity earlier this

The power outage took place from 3:40 p.m. Sept. 4. to 1:05 p.m. Sept. 5, through a Sunday evening until Monday afternoon.

"An electrical component failure in the power plant caused the outage," said Sheila Papa, corporate communications manager for Qulliq Energy Corp.

A full maintenance crew had to be flown into the community from Iqaluit, but was delayed due to weather conditions. The crew arrived in the community at 5 a.m. Sept. 5.

Asked if there were ongoing problems with the Kimmirut power plant, Papa said, "The age of Kimmirut's power plant infrastructure is starting to show. That being said, QEC's maintenance crew conducted a full inspection of the electrical system to ensure no other components were affected, and are now taking the appropriate steps to complete the necessary

- Michele LeTourneau