

Noel Sinclair
noel.sinclair@icloud.com

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Yukon Mineral Development Strategy Panel
P.O. Box 372 - 108 Elliott Street
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 6C4
panel@yukonmds.com

Re: Yukon Mineral Development Strategy

Dear MDS Panel members,

Thank you for the opportunity to add my voice to those of other concerned Yukon citizens, Yukon First Nations, the Yukon judiciary and Yukon environmental NGOs, all of whom have already expressed a consistent and compelling call for a modernized, socially progressive mining policy which better serves and protects the long-term interests of Yukoners.

Like the vast majority of the other commentators, I too am dismayed by the disproportionately negative social costs and long-term environmental liabilities which have resulted under the existing, archaic mining policy and regulatory framework.

Like so many of the other commentators, I encourage the panel to develop recommendations in support of a mining policy which allocates more fairly and sensibly the benefits of our precious mineral resources.

I also advocate in favour of a mining policy which imposes substantial, meaningful financial accountability measures at the front-end of mining initiatives.

No longer should Yukoners and Canadian taxpayers be left to finance billions of dollars in environmental remediation costs while mining company executives and shareholders cash-out and then hand over their corporate liabilities to taxpayers and business sector creditors through bankruptcy proceedings.

If mining proponents cannot afford to post adequate security for comprehensive clean up and restoration measures in the areas impacted by their industrial activities, Yukoners should not be expected to accept financial liability for the readily foreseeable risks of catastrophic environmental impacts which befall even the best intentioned and well financed mining ventures.

One wonders: what are the actual economic costs and benefits of mining to the Yukon economy? Can it be true that Yukoners receive more annual revenue from Territorial Park camping permits than we do from placer mining royalties?

We need a more comprehensive, holistic assessment of the net value of the mining sector in order to make better policy decisions concerning how Yukon will allocate the limited revenues which our non-renewable Crown resources yield.

What is the net value of the minerals we export? How much of that revenue remains within the Yukon economy and how much of it migrates out-of-Territory with visiting workers and out-of-Territory service industries, never to return? Why are we accounting for multi-million dollar taxpayer funded environmental remediation costs as a positive contribution from the mining sector to Yukon's gross domestic product?

I support substantially enhanced regulatory supervision and enforcement of existing common-sense legal standards designed to protect the quality of our fresh water and the conservation of our ever-dwindling fish and wildlife populations.

Let's get more boots on the ground - more Indigenous land stewards trained in mine site inspection, more conservation and fisheries enforcement officers, more mining inspectors.

To regain Yukoners' confidence in the management of the mining sector, let's also design more transparency and public access into the regulatory process: make it easier for the public to learn about environmental impacts as and when they happen as well as the penalties and other corrective measures imposed by mining industry regulators throughout the life-cycle of a mining project.

Also, let's eliminate, to the extent we can, the inherent conflicts of interest which arise inevitably within the Government of Yukon Department of Energy, Mines and Resources as a result of their dual mandate to both promote mining activity in the Yukon and to enforce environmental regulations.

Yukon, Canada and the world have changed immeasurably since the long ago days of the 1898 gold rush. Today we find ourselves in the midst of existential threats driven by climate change and exacerbated by a century of unmitigated consumption, waste and selfishness. We have allowed ourselves to satisfy our short-term material desires at the expense of our future and the wellbeing of every other living species who also depend upon a healthy, robust environment for their survival.

This is a reality which can no longer be ignored or denied, and it calls for immediate, science-based, rational policy development across all sectors to address and halt the rapid decline of our interconnected ecosystems.

In the face of these extreme environmental crises which span international boundaries, I call upon each of you panelists to be courageous and to advocate for mining policies which will help bring us back into better equilibrium with our planet and the creatures with whom we share it. You can accomplish that by ensuring that future mining policies align with the Yukon Government's and First Nation Governments' recent stated commitments to meaningful, substantial climate action and biodiversity conservation.

Mining activities will certainly continue to benefit all of us in the Yukon in the years ahead, but the time for fundamental policy adjustments is upon us now. Let's get inspired. Let's show the world that Yukoners are responsible, innovative and able stewards of this great land. Let's make a positive difference and steer our mining development strategy towards a truly sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Noel Sinclair