

## Richard Dwyer

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Mining reps address Qikiqtani Inuit Association meeting

by Emily Ridlington  
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IQALUIT -- Officials with the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation have acknowledged the Mary River iron mine project will have an impact on the environment and the surrounding areas.

"There will be an impact if we go north, south, east and west by road or by air," said Daniella Dimitrov, director and vice-chair of the board with Baffinland at a presentation made to the members of the board of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association at their annual general meeting on Oct. 20.

At the same time, Dimitrov said the goal is to find an alternative with the least amount of impact on the environment.

QIA president Okalik Eegeesiak thanked Dimitrov for acknowledging the project will have an impact instead of saying it will have only "minimal impact" as federal government officials who were involved with the proposed seismic testing in Cumberland Sound said. QIA won a court injunction to postpone the project for concerns it would disturb the natural environment.

Baffinland has been working on opening an iron mine at Mary River, some 160 km south of Pond Inlet on northern Baffin Island. Part of the project is a proposed year-round shipping route which would see ore loaded on icebreakers that would travel through Foxe Basin to the Hudson Strait and then to Europe.

This shipping routes worries QIA member at large George Qulaut from Iglulik. He said with so many ships going through Foxe Basin, this could deter whales from coming into the area.

"Elders are worried ... they don't know what to believe in," he said.

Qulaut added he did appreciate that elders' input was taken into consideration during the most recently-held round of community consultations.

Member-at-large Pilipuusi Paniaq from Pond Inlet questioned whether it would be a good idea to support the project, as the effects will be passed down to his children and grandchildren.

His comments focused on the potential disappearance of wildlife.

"Once there is not an abundance of animals we can't move on," he said.

Women's representative from Pond Inlet Joanna Innualuk-Kunnuk reminded all present there are not farms, chickens, cows or pigs in the territory and that residents are very dependent on wildlife as a food source.

Baffinland has already spent \$40 million on project development, in 2010, and more than \$400 million to date.

The company is putting together their draft environmental impact statement. Permits will still have to be reviewed by the Nunavut Impact Review Board and Dimitrov said she estimates it will still be two-and-a-half years before permits are obtained.

"No matter how much money we have to develop this project, the timeline will depend on permitting," she said.

Any changes to the project will push the timeline back. Once permits are obtained, Dimitrov said it will take four years to build the mine making it at least six-and-a-half years before any kind of ship will leave Baffin Island.

QIA members also wanted to ensure Inuit staff will be contracted to help build the mine and will be employed once it opens.

"The Inuit should be the first ones to work on those ships," said George Eckalook, QIA vice-president. He said, in the past, mining companies had promised Inuit would work for them but such promises were not kept.

Innualluk-Kunnuk said, to date, there have been no contracts awarded to companies from her community, with all contractors coming from the outside.

"I want you to work closely with the community," she said.

Dimitrov said the company has already hired 45 Inuit employees with 25 coming from Pond Inlet, 10 from Iglulik and 10 from Iqaluit.

In order for beneficiaries to benefit from the development of the mine, Dimitrov said there first has to be development.

"I believe we have the same goal: developing the project for the benefit of the communities," she said.

Baffinland plans to hold a week-long session at the end of November and early December at Mary River with representatives from QIA and the communities to discuss monitoring and migration of animals in the region. Dimitrov said there will also community consultations done in seven communities around the same time period.

One idea taken away from the discussion, suggested by several members, was that the company should have a representative in each community to help improve communications.

"We're not against development but we expect you to participate adequately and address the communities' concerns," said Eegeesiak.