

Few Inuit among hundreds of Nunavut board submissions on Uravan proposal

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CBC News

The Nunavut Impact Review board has received hundreds of letters from people opposed to a proposed uranium exploration project for caribou calving grounds in Nunavut, but few of the submissions are from local Inuit.

About 200 letters and emails have been sent to the review board since Dec. 1, with most asking the board to deny Uravan Minerals Inc.'s application to carry out preliminary drilling at its Garry Lake site, located 245 kilometres northwest of Baker Lake in Nunavut's Kivalliq region.

Most of those who have submitted entries are against uranium exploration in the area, which is also the calving grounds of the Beverley caribou herd.

But out of the emails and letters to the board, only a few have come from local Nunavummiut.

"I don't hear the Inuit saying much, and especially the people of Baker Lake," said Alex Hall of Fort Smith, N.W.T., who has spent the last 35 years guiding canoe trips through the calving grounds.

"I've travelled all over the post-calving areas in the summer and we have seen virtually no caribou, or their sign, in the last three years," Hall said. "They've just disappeared off the map."

In an email sent to the review board on Jan. 9, the Baker Lake hunters and trappers organization called on the board to "delay exploration" for Uravan while the Nunavut government works out a caribou protection act.

The organization also said Baker Lake residents have not had enough time to express their views. As well, officials say they want input from wildlife management boards on the effects of development on caribou.

'The people have to speak up'

In another email sent Jan. 12, Baker Lake residents Winnie Putumiraqtuq Ikinilik and Jacob Ikinilik said they and other Inuit elders oppose Uravan's proposal, citing concerns with the number of caribou they've seen in the area.

"At least there is this process taking place," said Marilyn Crawford of the Community Coalition Against Uranium Mining in Ontario, which also has submitted a letter to the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

The impact review board will hold a public hearing, likely in Baker Lake, once Uravan completes its environmental impact statement on its proposed project.

"I don't hear Inuit say anything over there, in Nunavut. And unless they do, I don't think they can expect the NIRB to turn down Uravan," Hall said.

"The people have to speak up. And if they don't, they're going to get what they deserve."

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AlexinNunavut wrote:Posted 2009/01/16

at 1:01 PM ETIt could be that the southern respondents are ecotourists and have been prompted to respond to this proposed development by their Outfitter.

Perhaps if Nunavut Tourism provided more support to Inuit in participating in this type of tourism, Inuit would see more value to leaving the land as it is and have people pay to see it. Perhaps if Gjoa Haven and Baker Lake people still used the land like they did in the 70's, many more would see this project potentially impacting their harvesting (I guess Harvester Support aint working).

However I suspect that even a small drilling program by a mineral explorer will create more benefits to Inuit than several years of canoe trips by an NWT Outfitter through this area.

And, when you ask a person whether an initial exploration program is worth the impact it would have on the land, of course given the current circumstances, most Inuit would probably say the balance of benefits outweigh the environmental cost. That's because Inuit are not deriving much other benefit from that land at present.

In any case, IF they find enough Uranium to mine, IF they can design a profitable mine, then they would be subject to a full EA on that project anyway.

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HELLO from eskimo wrote:Posted 2009/01/16

at 12:06 AM ETi respect Joan Scottie from what I've read about her therefore I endorse what she wrote and in addition to that, have two things to point out:

1) i think this story is a result of the fact that Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. passed an uranium exploration and mining policy. people are not speaking out about it since the organization that represents them have already spoke out for them.

2) there was no large protests against NTI for the actions in point 1 which surprised me greatly and furthermore, to but the icing on the cake, the results of the last elections came out with the same leadership.

These two events are unfortunate for people campaigning against uranium mining/exploration in that specific area and/or territory-wide yet they could prove to strengthen their fight.

visit <http://www.arctic-caribou.com> for some interesting information.

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ykphil wrote:Posted 2009/01/16

at 11:42 AM ETTo JoanScottie:

I fully agree with you. Inuit hunters don't use the internet, they don't use FTP sites to review applications, they don't feel comfortable interacting within the bounds of public hearings held by NIRB or any other board. I say, scrap the whole process and replace it with a real Inuit-based process, designed by and for Inuit, not by Southern lawyers who incidentally were the ones who concocted these legal