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May 6, 2004

Honourable Andy Mitchell
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
House of Commons
Ottawa ON
K1A 0H6

RE: Bathurst Inlet Port and Road Project

Dear Minister Mitchell

Following up on the meeting you kindly hosted in Yellowknife on March 17, 2004 with CARC staff and others, we understand that you may be making a decision soon about the Bathurst Inlet Port and Road (BIPAR) project. In keeping with our previous correspondence with the former DIAND minister, Robert Nault (June 23 2003), as well as our submission to the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) of August 6 2003, we are writing to urge you to exercise your authority under s. 12.4.7(c) of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and "...inform the proponent that the proposal should be abandoned or modified and resubmitted to NIRB to be dealt with in accordance with Section 12.4.4".

As with numerous NWT and Nunavut organisations, and other individuals, who expressed their views to the NIRB in August 2003 and earlier, we continue to be concerned that this proposal is insufficiently developed and detailed for assessment to proceed, and that it should be referred back to the proponent for a thorough examination of alternative routing. In the environmental evaluation of the Izok Lake project prepared by the Metall Mining Corporation in 1993, a proposed route from Izok Lake to a port east of Kugluktuk was very well studied and a great deal of that information is available and relevant to the consideration of this project. From our evaluation, such a route would appear to have two distinct advantages: it avoids the calving and post-calving grounds of the Bathurst caribou herd and provides a safer, more easily accessed port site for both community resupply and mine resupply.

We suggest, with respect, that the cost of both routes should be assessed from a “full cost” perspective, including potential impacts on caribou and cultural resources, and on communities dependant on caribou. Relative risks of each route should be assessed, including a consideration of the risks attendant on operating the shipping business envisaged by the proponents.

Should you not agree with our assessment, we urge you, at the very least to consider the serious public concern that this proposal has raised, both in the NWT and Nunavut, and exercise your authority under s. 12.4.7(a) of the NLCA and refer this proposal to a federal environmental assessment panel (Part 6 Review).

There is tremendous uncertainty regarding this proposal in terms of its economic viability, need for public investment, scope of the project, transboundary issues, possible effects on Canadian sovereignty, impacts on the marine environment from shipping, and potential cumulative effects on the Bathurst caribou herd that was recently announced to be in decline. This is not a simple project taking place in Nunavut but includes components in the NWT (i.e., resupply of operating mines).

Significant public concern with the project has already been voiced from First Nations in the NWT that rely on the Bathurst caribou herd, the community of Bathurst Inlet, owners of Bathurst Inlet Lodge (a world-class ecotourism destination), the Bathurst Caribou Management Planning Committee (representing NWT and Nunavut users of the caribou), the Government of the NWT, and environmental organizations. All of these bodies have requested that a broader, more rigorous environmental assessment is needed, like that available under Part 6 of the NLCA. There should be nothing to fear with a more rigorous review that will ensure residents of the NWT have adequate opportunities for meaningful participation.

We look forward to your decision on this critically important issue for the North and would be pleased to discuss any of this with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Karen G. Wristen
Executive Director

cc. Ms. Elizabeth Copland, Chairperson, Nunavut Impact Review Board
Mr. Thomas Kudloo, Chairperson, Nunavut Water Board
Hon. David Anderson, Minister of Environment
Hon. Geoff Regan, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Hon. Paul Okalik, Premier of Nunavut
Hon. Joseph Handley, Premier of the NWT
Hon. Brendan Bell, Minister of Resources, Wildlife, and Economic Development, NWT
Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, MP Western Arctic
Hon. Nancy Karetak-Lindell, MP Nunavut
Mr. Paul Kaludjak, President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

Mr. Charlie Evalik, President, Kitikmeot Inuit Association
Mr. Todd Burlingame, Chairperson, Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board
Mr. Sid Gershberg, President, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency
Grand Chief Joe Rabesca, Dogrib Treaty 11 Tribal Council
Chiefs Darrell Beaulieu and Peter Liske, Yellowknives Dene First Nation
Chief Archie Catholique, Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation
Mr. North Douglas, President, North Slave Métis Alliance