



TOGETHER TODAY... FOR OUR CHILDREN TOMORROW

COUNCIL OF YUKON FIRST NATIONS

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PRESS RELEASE

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The Government of Canada (Canada) is moving forward with changes to Yukon's environmental and socio-economic assessment legislation (Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act) as part of its unilateral plan to homogenize all northern environmental assessment regimes, shorten assessment timelines, and increase Ministerial influence on what should be an independent process. The changes are part of Bill S-6, Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act, introduced in the Senate on June 3, 2014.

This proposed legislation undermines sound environmental stewardship through the systematic stripping away of previously held standards for assessable activities and direct attacks on the independence of the assessment process.

The legislation proposes to include the adequacy review stage as part of the overall assessment timeline, which will cause major problems for the regime because the total length of time for assessments remains unchanged. Canada previously assured the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) and participating Yukon First Nations that this would not happen. "It's an about-face," said Grand Chief Ruth Massie. "We have been engaged in this Canada-led initiative since early 2012 and were assured throughout the process that the adequacy review would not be included in the assessment timeline. Bill S-6 clearly reads otherwise."

The proposed amendments instill public non-confidence in what should be a neutral and transparent process by providing broad and unfettered discretionary authority to the Minister to unilaterally issue policy direction to the Board and to delegate all of his or her authority flowing from the YESAA to his or her territorial counterpart.

After it completed the proposed changes, Canada told CYFN that it sought input about the revisions from only five groups: the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, Mining Association of Canada, Yukon Chamber of Mines, and Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, thereby engaging only the mining industry under a veil of secrecy. "Yukoners should be outraged that nobody, not even Yukon Government, is asking their opinions about an assessment regime that will directly affect them and their families," added Grand Chief Massie. "Where's the transparency? Where's the honesty? Where's the responsibility?"

CYFN supports the amendments of the YESAA which implement the recommendations set out in the interim Five-year Review but cannot support any proposed amendment that was not discussed during the review or any amendment that is inconsistent with the spirit and intent of Chapter 12 of Yukon First Nation Final Agreements or with the scope and nature of the statute that was jointly developed by the Parties.

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