

Changes to Yukon's environmental and economic assessment threaten the environment and create uncertainty that will harm Yukon's economy, say Yukon's First Nations

Yukon First Nations are unanimous in their call for changes to Bill S-6 to protect against political interference

Dec 3, 2014 (Ottawa, Ontario) The Harper Government is upsetting the delicate balance between development and environmental protection through dramatic changes to a federal law known as the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA), say Yukon First Nations. 14 Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations were invited to Ottawa this week only to receive a stern rebuke from Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Bernard Valcourt.

"The Minister shut us down by telling us we are "not real governments" and therefore he does not need to make us active participants in changing legislation that arises from our treaties," said Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation Chief, Eric Fairclough. "This flies in the face of recent court decisions that have affirmed the duty to consult First Nations. It is an insult and a signal to First Nations everywhere that our views don't count."

The Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations were called to Ottawa as the Harper government introduced Bill S-6 in the House of Commons containing amendments which water down the Yukon environmental and socio-economic assessment legislation and leave the process open to political interference by the federal government.

"Frankly our concern is that complex projects will be rushed through the approval process without proper assessment if these changes go through," says Grand Chief of the Council Yukon First Nations, Ruth Massie. "These amendments threaten Yukon's environment and will create uncertainty and scare off investment and jobs which will put Yukon's economy at risk."

One of the largest mines ever proposed in Canada is currently in the environmental assessment process in Yukon. We need to be sure that projects of this scale receive thorough and independent assessments.

The Yukon First Nations have the backing of at least two mining companies operating in the Yukon that have sent letters to Minister Valcourt warning that regulatory reforms without meaningful consultation will create tension and uncertainty and urging the government to find a solution.

"A strategy for northern development has to be more than photo-ops for the Franklin expedition," says Chief Fairclough. "We urge the Minister and the Harper government to find a solution which honours the spirit and intent of First Nations final agreements."

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