

Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation

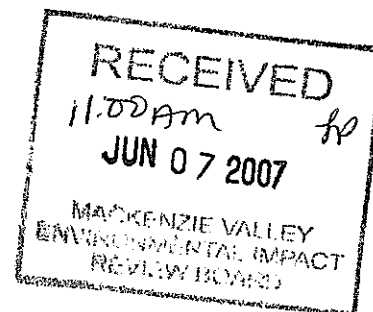
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June 6, 2007

Honourable Jim Prentice
Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs
House of Commons Confederation Building, Room 407
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Minister Prentice:

I have been reading some of the letters you have been receiving from mining special interest groups and exploration companies with regards to the recent MVEIRB recommendation on UR-Energy. I am very dismayed at the level of anger and rhetoric demonstrated in these letters, and would hope that we could all sustain a level of civilized dialogue without resorting to base accusations. In this spirit, please consider the following in your deliberations with regard to the MVEIRB decision.

First and foremost, I must dispel the patronizing notion promoted by the mining special interests that the First Nations are somehow "puppets" of concerned NGOs. The Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation has, and always will, make decisions and take action in the best interest of its membership. In the case of UR-Energy, I and my staff have carefully researched the relevant issues and represented the will of my people. We have never altered our positions to satisfy any special interest, be they industrial or environmental.

The mining special interests have a profound misunderstanding of the intrinsic significance of the upper Thelon from the perspective of the Dene people, and indeed of

many Canadians. Recently I tabled a resolution at the Dene Nation Assembly in Yellowknife indicating that the Dene would not support unfettered, unplanned uranium development in the upper Thelon – this resolution passed unanimously, supported pan-territorially by all the Dene Chiefs. Why such support? The significance of the Thelon to our people as a center of our civilization, our history, our spirituality, and our lifestyle cannot be overstated. To allow mineral exploitation to proceed in the region without careful planning and consideration is tantamount to allowing the desecration of our church, our grocery, our graveyard, and our museum. Such sacrilege is nothing less than expediting the demise of our unique culture and way of life.

The Dene have always maintained that the most important aspect of their culture is the material, cultural, and spiritual relationship to caribou. It is unfortunate that the mining special interests should choose to demean this relationship and its vulnerability in the modern era. Years of accumulated scientific and traditional knowledge research have proven that the barren ground caribou are in serious decline across the north. It is incumbent upon all of us to insure that we proceed with the utmost caution in the development of the north in order to insure that this key resource remains for the future generations.

It is clear that the mining special interests consider the recent MVEIRB decision on UR-Energy very threatening to their current methods of conducting business in the north. They indicate in their correspondence that mineral tenure “rights” as established through the *Canada Mining Regulations* are being compromised. I would point out that the constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights of indigenous peoples, which allow us to pursue our distinct lifestyles in relation to the land, have been and continue to be compromised by the free-entry system. Our rights arise from the Canadian Constitution, and far supersede any privileges granted through statutory regulations. The foremost responsibility of the federal Crown is to protect the constitutional rights of its citizens.


Recent jurisprudence has consistently reinforced the paramount responsibility of the federal government to protect treaty and aboriginal rights, and to consult with the First Nations wherever infringements might occur. The requirement for such consultation continues to be ignored by government and industry. Long passed are the days where aboriginal territories are to be treated as vacant frontiers ripe for rapid resource exploitation. The challenge for industry and government is to adapt to this new reality – a reality where dialogue, respect, engagement, and participation with aboriginal peoples is simply a part of good business.

I expect you to adopt the MVEIRB recommendations and suggestions. This is an unprecedented opportunity. It is an opportunity to assist First Nations and industry as they move forward into a new reality vis-à-vis lands and resources in the north. The new reality is that aboriginal people must be consulted and engaged – this is an opportunity to develop an effective process whereby this can occur. The new reality is that the

cumulative effects of development may well jeopardize the well-being of northern peoples and the intrinsic values of our northern environments – this is an opportunity to plan carefully to insure that the industry and environment can co-exist. The new reality is that outstanding land claims and treaty negotiations are significantly hampering the ability of both industry and First Nations to achieve their interests – this is an opportunity to resolve the age-old differences for a clearer, consistent, and more positive future for all.

It is always difficult when change is foisted upon us. But change is the only constant – we must all adapt or be left behind. I trust that your legacy will be one of forward thinking rather than the maintenance of an archaic status quo.

Marsi Cho,



Chief Adeline Jonasson
Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation

- c. Dennis Bevington – Member of Parliament for the Western Arctic
- Honourable John Baird – Minister of the Environment
- Anita Neville – Indian Affairs Critic, Liberal Party of Canada
- Grand Chief Phil Fontaine – Assembly of First Nations
- Grand Chief Bill Erasmus – Dene Nation
- Chief Bill Norm – Deninu Kue First Nation
- Chief Peter Liske – Yellowknives Dene First Nation
- Chief Fred Sangris – Yellowknives Dene First Nation
- Zoe Raemer – A/Regional Director General, DIAND
- Gabrielle Mackenzie-Scott – Chair, MVEIRB