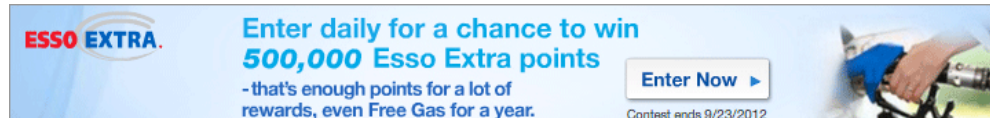


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Nunavut officials register concerns at Baffinland hearings



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Government of Nunavut officials were before the Nunavut Impact Review Board in Iqaluit on Wednesday to talk about Baffinland's Mary River iron project.

Final hearings are underway this week to determine whether the mine can go ahead.

Overall, the Nunavut Government says it supports the project, recognizing that it will mean a lot of money and jobs for the territory, but it has recommended a number of conditions.

The government has serious concerns about the company's projections especially when it comes to impacts on wildlife and strains on government services.

Baffinland has claimed its project would have little or no impact on wildlife such as caribou. But Peter Hale, manager of wildlife research for Nunavut's Department of Environment, disputes that.

"It is the Government of Nunavut's position that a determination of 'no significant impact' is not supported by the analysis," he said.

Hale said the mine site at Mary River is in the middle of a caribou calving ground on North Baffin and that there's evidence the North Baffin caribou population may already be in trouble.

Hale said polar bears might also be affected by Baffinland's plan to ship ore year round through Foxe Basin and Hudson Strait.

The GN's concerns about wildlife have been echoed by Environment Canada and the Makivik Corporation in Nunavik.

Rob Eno, director of environmental protection with the Department of Environment, said he agrees with Baffinland's assessment that the risk of a fuel spill is low. Baffinland plans to keep a supply of fuel at Steensby Inlet over the winter, during construction of the mine. The fuel would be kept on a floating storage vessel.

But he said if a spill happens under ice it will be almost impossible to clean up.

"There is no very, very effective method of recovering large amounts of oil under ice, so generally we take the view that you have to do everything you can to prevent that happening in the first place, because once it gets under the ice it's very difficult to recover, if at all," he said.

Officials also argue the project could put a strain on some health and social services in the territory as communities' populations increase.

Greg Missal, a spokesperson for Baffinland, said "Obviously our experts on the subject have come up with slightly different conclusions on those and again it comes down to monitoring in the future to see what the results are."