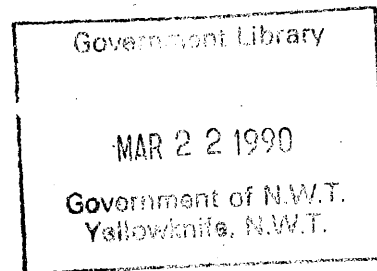




Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly / ᓄᓇᓕᓕᓐᓂᓐ ᓂᓄᓐᓂᓐ ᓂᓄᓐᓂᓐ

March 14, 1990

An "Open Letter" to Brian Weir  
Director, N.W.T. Chamber of Mines



Dear Mr. Weir:

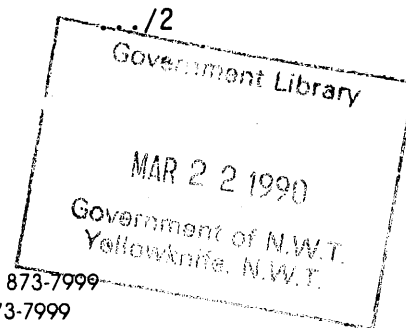
I am writing in response to your comments as reported in the article "Kiggavik motion angers Chamber of Mines," which was published in the Yellowknifer on March 2, 1990. The article begins with the sentence "The N.W.T. Chamber of Mines is outraged at Peter Ernerk's motion for the legislative assembly to oppose the proposed Kiggavik uranium mine."

You were quoted as saying that "He's turning this into an emotional issue." I disagree. Keewatin Inuit have very good reasons to be opposed to uranium mining. I have very good reasons for moving the motion that I did. It is your response to my motion which is emotional and not based on reason.

Our opposition to the Kiggavik proposal is based on facts. It is our right to decide which facts are the relevant facts on which to base our decision. Perhaps our choice of relevant facts is different than your choice of relevant facts. You have a right to voice your opinion, based on your facts, and we have a right to voice ours.

Mining companies have nothing to teach Inuit about the environment. Our land-use decisions are based on the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of generations. We practiced sustainable development long before it became trendy.

You were quoted as saying that "He's usurping the government's power by not waiting for the FEARO report." I disagree. I'm not usurping anyone's power, and there's nothing wrong with any level of government taking a position before a FEARO report is issued. Several municipal governments in Nunavut and Regional Councils in Nunavut i.e. Baffin Regional Council, Keewatin Regional Council have done so already.



The GNWT has the right to support or oppose any project at any time. The GNWT supported the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline before the National Energy Board issued a report. The GNWT opposed the proposed pulp and paper mills in northern Alberta before that review board issued a report.

Keewatin Inuit have the right to ask the GNWT to oppose the Kiggavik proposal before the FEARO panel issues a report, and as an MLA I have the right to move a motion in the Legislative Assembly on their behalf. It's called democracy.

The people of Baker Lake are going to vote in a plebiscite on March 26. I expect they are going to say an overwhelming NO to Kiggavik. The Hamlet Council will then adopt a position based on that vote. At the hearings the Hamlet Council will tell the FEARO panel that it is opposed to the proposal. The FEARO panel will take that into account when they write their report. It's called democracy. Do you see anything wrong with this?

You pointed out that Urangesellschaft has spent more than \$300 million in development and exploration work in the Keewatin, and said that "They were quick to let UG spend the exploration money. Now when it comes to the payoff, the government is going against them."

You may remember that the Inuit of Baker Lake opposed exploration for uranium in the first place. You may remember that there was a major court case about uranium exploration in the Keewatin, during which the uranium companies and the Government of Canada argued that Inuit have no aboriginal right to use the land. This was most unfortunate. You may not remember this, but we do.

But your point is an important one. It's not fair for the federal government to allow companies to spend millions of dollars exploring for something which Inuit won't let them mine. The position taken by Keewatin Inuit is therefore entirely consistent - no uranium exploration and no uranium mining. That's why I included exploration in my motion.

Inuit have never been "anti-development." Keewatin Inuit have adopted a clear, sensible position. YES to non-renewable resource development IF it is environmentally acceptable - according to OUR definition of environmental acceptability - and benefits the region with jobs and contracts. NO to uranium exploration and mining. If the GNWT adopts a clear, sensible position like this then the mining companies will know what the rules are.



You state that my motion "doesn't show good faith to the mineral exploration industry." Keep in mind that the people of Rankin Inlet expressed concern about the tailings from the abandoned nickel mines to government and industry officials for years. Only now are we beginning to learn the truth.

The Cree and Chipewyan who live near the uranium mines in northern Saskatchewan still aren't being told the truth about the impact on the environment there. The mining companies and the federal and provincial governments refuse to fund research projects.

The Kiggavik ore body is not migratory. There's no need to hurry the development process. Keewatin Inuit know that the safe thing to do is leave the uranium right where it is- in the ground- for another generation or two. Perhaps by then you will understand our reluctance to put our lifestyle in jeopardy.

My motion respects the wishes of my constituents by initiating a public debate on an issue of great concern to us. If the mining industry wants to show "good faith" it will respect our right to make our own decisions for our own reasons... for once.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ernerk  
MLA, Aivilik  
Rankin Inlet, N.W.T.  
XOC OGO