

NWT COALITION AGAINST PULP MILL POLLUTION
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PRESS RELEASE

NWT COALITION FORMS TO OPPOSE PULP MILLS IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

YELLOWKNIFE. - GROUPS REPRESENTING COMMUNITIES, REGIONS, ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND LABOUR IN THE MACKENZIE VALLEY ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION TODAY OF A COALITION TO OPPOSE THE CONSTRUCTION OF ALBERTA-PACIFIC'S (ALPAC) PULP MILL NEAR ATHABASCA. THE GROUPS ARE CONVINCED THE MILLS WILL POLLUTE NWT WATERS DOWNSTREAM WITH DEADLY DIOXINS AND FURANS AND OTHER TOXIC CHLORINATED ORGANIC COMPOUNDS. THE COALITION IS DEMANDING THAT MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT ROBERT DECOTRET IMMEDIATELY CALL FOR A FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT.

THE COALITION WILL CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF A COURT ACTION AGAINST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IF AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT IS NOT INITIATED. "THE ALPAC PROJECT WILL HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON NWT WATERS AND COULD CAUSE SERIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES" SAID COALITION ORGANIZER JOHN MCCULLUM. "THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PEOPLE OF THE NWT TO PROTECT US FROM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS, ESPECIALLY NATIVE PEOPLE WHO LIVE BY HUNTING, FISHING AND TRAPPING IN AND ALONG THE WATERS DOWNSTREAM FROM THE PROPOSED MILL."

THE COALITION WILL ALSO CONSIDER OTHER FORMS OF PROTEST IF THE GOVERNMENTS OF CANADA AND ALBERTA CONTINUE TO RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER THE RIGHTS AND HEALTH OF NWT CITIZENS.

THE NEED FOR THE COALITION AROSE AFTER THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT GAVE THE GO AHEAD FOR CONSTRUCTION OF THE ALPAC MILL ON DEC. 21, 1990. PREPARATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION - BUSH CUTTING AND ROAD BUILDING - HAVE ALREADY BEGUN.

AN INITIAL FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT DETERMINED A YEAR AGO THAT THE MILL SHOULD NOT BE APPROVED BECAUSE RISKS TO THE ECOSYSTEM WERE TOO HIGH. THE PANEL WARNED THAT TOXIC CHLORINATED ORGANICS WERE ALREADY BIOACCUMULATING IN FISH AND THAT "THE LARGE CAPACITY OF THE MILL MAKES THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN UNACCEPTABLE DEGREE OF CONTAMINATION HIGH, IN PARTICULAR SINCE THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OF EXISTING MILLS HAVE ALREADY RESULTED IN MEASURABLE CONTAMINATION OF THE FISHERY WITH DIOXINS, FURANS AND OTHER TOXIC CHLORINATED ORGANIC COMPOUNDS."

ALPAC SUBMITTED A REVISED PROPOSAL IN THE SUMMER AND THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT APPOINTED A SO-CALLED SCIENTIFIC REVIEW PANEL TO EXAMINE THE NEW PROPOSAL. THE PANEL WAS TOLD ONLY TO DETERMINE WHETHER ALPAC'S PROPOSAL MIGHT WORK, NOT WHAT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS WOULD BE. NO HEARINGS WERE HELD IN THE NWT, NO NWT PRESENTATIONS WERE MADE TO THE PANEL AND THE NWT DID NOT HAVE ANY REPRESENTATIVES ON THE PANEL. THE PANEL FOUND THAT ALPAC'S PROPOSAL WOULD RESULT IN THE SAME CHEMICALS GOING INTO THE RIVER BUT IN LOWER AMOUNTS.

THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT APPROVED THE NEW ALPAC PROPOSAL ON THE BASIS OF THE SECOND PANEL'S REPORT, IGNORING THE POTENTIAL DANGER TO THE DOWNSTREAM ECOSYSTEM.

THE COALITION IS MADE UP OF: THE SLAVE RIVER COALITION, THE DENE NATION, THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES FEDERATION OF LABOUR, THE METIS ASSOCIATION OF THE NWT, ECOLOGY NORTH, THE DEH CHO REGIONAL COUNCIL AND THE SAH TU REGIONAL COUNCIL. ORGANIZERS SAY THEY ARE INVITING ANY GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS INTERESTED IN THE PULP MILL ISSUE TO JOIN THE COALITION AND SUPPORT THEIR CAUSE.

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