

Mineral Exploration Protocol in Akaitcho Territory, Northwest Territories

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Traditional lands used for exploration and mine development is an issue for concern of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) in Akaitcho Territory, located near Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. On the other hand, the Yellowknives Dene do not oppose exploration and mining in its region. The solution is through meaningful community consultation, collaboration and application process.

For the 1300 members of the YKDFN who live in the two communities of Dettah and Ndilo, less than 100 of its people work at the three diamond mines adjacent the band's territory – BHP Billiton, Diavik Diamond Mines Inc. and De Beers Canada. These diamond mines are located on the traditional territory of Akaitcho which the Dene refers to as Chief Drygeese lands. The YKDFN has Participation Agreements and Impact Benefit Agreements with the three diamond mining companies.

Recent Supreme Court decisions have jacked-up the requirement or obligation of consultation and accommodation in terms of mining and exploration. The Dene in Akaitcho Territory strongly oppose wrongful practice concerning exploration and mining without proper community consultation.

The Dene have obligations to its membership and have demanded that industry recognize their inherent and treaty rights within its traditional territory to ensure that development does not come before preservation of the Dene lands and the environment through cumulative impacts of mineral activity. The increase in aboriginal participation can be credited to the collaboration of communities, governments, educational institutions and the mining industry. The Dene are now building local capacity through socio-economic and environmental positions. Aboriginal people are now realizing the potential and possibilities that mining brings to the region. Economic development, employment, training, business opportunities and investment are now reality – the Dene want a portion of the mineral riches that are taken from its traditional territory.

An application process currently in use is for exploration and mining industry spells out the need for meaningful dialogue through extensive community consultation processes to identify the complexity of challenges faced by the Dene in terms of mineral exploration and mining development taking place on its traditional lands. The application process is under significant review. It is important that all parties recognize that short and long term activities in Drybones Bay will occur near our communities and traditional lands. The YKDFN will be impacted to a greater extent and significantly longer than any other groups in the area. YKDFN clearly recognizes the major environmental and social challenges that will face us.

In the past, throughout the review phase, we noted the intensive yet narrowly focused efforts by southern based environmental protection agencies to emphasize the negative impacts of the activities. What I have said and what you have heard, I encourage you to consider the words of those on whose traditional lands the work is being done.