

LETTERS

# B.C. government's environmental assessments are thorough

In light of recent media coverage of the Ajax mine proposal, I feel it is important to highlight the strengths of the provincial environmental assessment process we have in British Columbia.

All provincial environmental assessments are conducted in a thorough, transparent and comprehensive manner that includes extensive public consultation as required by the B.C. Environmental Assessment Act.

All environmental assessments conducted by the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) require an objective assessment of the potential environmental, social, economic, health and heritage effects, including an assessment of cumulative effects.

For every environmental assessment, the EAO brings together a group of technical experts from the provincial, federal and local governments, including participation of First Nations.

This working group makes sure the technical review of the proposed project is comprehen-

sive by advising EAO early in the assessment process of the information and studies required and commenting on this information as it is provided. Proponents are required to respond to comments provided by the working group and to work with it to identify solutions that avoid or mitigate potential adverse impacts.

The environmental assessment process includes a minimum of two public comment periods.

Typically, that includes one for the public to comment on the procedures, information and studies required to conduct the assessment, and the other for the public to comment on the proponent's application for an environmental assessment certificate.

EAO also conducts open houses in communities located near proposed projects during these public comment periods to provide information on the project and the assessment process and to get local input.

The public comment periods can involve large numbers of

submissions from interest groups and members of the public.

The EAO requires proponents to respond to these comments. All comments received from the public, First Nations and technical experts with the working group are posted to the EAO's website, along with the proponent's responses.

This transparent approach to public consultation ensures that members of the public are aware of the opportunity to participate and allows them to see how their comments have been addressed in the environmental assessment for a proposed project.

In summary, I believe the environmental assessment process led by the EAO is comprehensive, objective and open, and provides opportunities for the public to obtain timely information about proposed projects and to provide comments in a meaningful manner.

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