

CoalWatch Comox Valley

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Comox coal mine plans need full public hearings and a joint federal and provincial expert review panel

You don't need a canary to convince CoalWatch Comox Valley that mid-Vancouver Island doesn't need another coal mine, particularly the Raven Underground Coal project planned for their region. The group called on the provincial and federal governments Monday to conduct the environmental assessments of the project with a Joint Review Panel process.

"The potential impacts of coal mining in this area must be fully, independently and publicly assessed to ensure the protection of the environment, the local economy and the health and well-being of the residents who rely on nearby watersheds for drinking water," says John Snyder for CoalWatch Comox Valley. "The submission points to examples in BC where environmental impacts of mines—some of them abandoned decades ago—are being felt and cleanup being paid for in the millions of dollars by taxpayers."

On behalf of CoalWatch Comox Valley, the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria and Victoria law firm Devlin & Gailus delivered a submission to the provincial and federal governments Monday requesting a joint federal/provincial environmental assessment by independent experts that includes full public hearings.

The submission states, "The proposed coal mine has profound implications for the environment and future of mid-Vancouver Island, and therefore requires this most thorough form of public participation and review."

Various concerns associated with the proposed project, include:

- toxic contamination of surface water, aquifers and Baynes Sound; coal dust pollution;
- destruction or disturbance of wildlife habitat and biodiversity corridors;
- increased traffic and road hazards from the B-train vehicles hauling coal from Comox Valley to Port Alberni;
- socio-economic impacts should the project affect tourism, real estate, retirement-oriented businesses, the shellfish industry and other local businesses; and
- the overall contribution of the project to climate change, which appears contradictory to provincial and federal government efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Along with the potential for adverse environmental effects, the submission points to the public interest when calling for a Joint Review Panel with public hearings due to the deep and widespread public concerns associated with the proposed project. The submission notes many local organizations have expressed concern over the project as have local governments. Five local governments in the region have requested comprehensive aquifer mapping along with federal Environmental Assessment due to the potential impact of the proposed mine on fisheries in Baynes Sound.

"The mine site is just a few kilometres away from the coast," says Snyder. "It's close to a region well known for its seafood industry, which employs hundreds of people and brings in millions of dollars annually."

The submission is available at: www.elc.uvic.ca and <http://www.coalwatch.ca/>

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