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Nunavut regulators issue final hearing topics for Mary River iron mine project

Railway, port, impacts "may warrant focused discussion"

NUNATSIAQ NEWS

Even after this month's three-day technical meeting in Iqaluit, the talk about the Mary River iron mine project and its impacts just goes on.

And many contentious topics — such as the location of the mine's proposed port, the need for year-round shipping and potential impacts on wildlife — remain to be discussed this July during the final hearings on the Mary River iron mine project.

On May 8, the Nunavut Impact Review Board confirmed the dates of the final hearings, which will take place in Iqaluit, July 16 to 20, in Igloolik July 23 to 25, and in Pond Inlet July 26 to 28.

The hearings mark one of the last steps in the permitting process for Baffinland, a private company under the control of ArcelorMittal, the European steel-making giant, and a private investment firm, Iron Ore Holdings LP, which wants to transport about 18 million tonnes or more of iron ore from Mary River to Steensby Inlet for markets in Europe and Asia over a period of least 37 years — and some predict up to 100 years.

After the hearings wrap up, the NIRB has until mid-September to produce its permitting report on the project, which could lead to the iron mine project moving ahead next year.

At the July hearings, the following "key issues in particular may warrant focused discussion," the NIRB said late May 11:

• alternatives to the proposed railway routing, marine shipping route and, among other issues, the need for "periodic suspension of shipping activities;"

• construction and operation of the proposed railway, including management plans for mitigation of potential impacts to caribou and other wildlife;

• impacts from proposed mining and quarrying activities, including dust from the transport and storage of waste rock and ore n, and impacts to water quality from acid rock drainage;

• adequacy of measures to protect archaeological and other heritage sites, such as the 100 inuksuit which mark out a route to Steensby Inlet;

• accidents and malfunctions associated with proposed marine transport and storage of bulk fuel,

including overwintering of fuel vessels and emergency preparedness;

• adequacy of baseline information about marine impacts and proposed monitoring and adaptive management plans;

• management of ballast water;

• impacts to marine mammals and Inuit harvesting resulting from proposed year-round shipping;

• transboundary impacts associated with proposed shipping activities;

• direct and indirect socio-economic impacts, including impacts to communities, "capacity of current services to meet future needs, traditional land use and food security;"

The NIRB may also add other issues raised by the final written submissions about the project, which are due May 30, and from Baffinland's response, due June 8.