



## TŚILHQOT'IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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The Hon. Michael Ignatieff,  
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Dear Mr. Ignatieff,

We are writing to you to urge you to defend the Honour of the Crown regarding First Nations and the integrity of Canadian Environmental Review Process which are at stake in the case of the proposed Prosperity Mine in BC. We ask that you take a stand and press the federal Government to heed the findings of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency panel review, which found this proposed mine would cause significant and irreparable harm.

Approval of the proposed mine in defiance of the panel's conclusions would constitute a flagrant and unlawful violation of the constitutional rights of the Tsilhqot'in people under s. 35 of the *Constitution Act*. It would be a slap in the face to First Nations everywhere. It would also further demonstrate to the world Canada's disregard for the environment and the laws and principles designed to protect it.

For our Tsilhqot'in people, on whose traditional lands the mine would be imposed, and whose culture, spirituality and way of life would be severely damaged and in some cases destroyed, this is a battle for our homes, our rights and our future.

It is also a national matter. As the overwhelming support from provincial and national First Nations groups and leaders demonstrates, we are dealing with issues that go far beyond our territory. At stake is the faith of First Nations across BC and Canada in the process, and they are determined to take a stand against this proposed mine.

The facts are clear. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's review panel report on July 2 concluded that the proposed Prosperity Mine would: "Result in significant adverse environmental effects on fish and fish habitat, on navigation, on the current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes by First Nations and on cultural heritage, and on certain potential or established Aboriginal rights or title."

The report found the proposed "Prosperity Lake" – the fake lake that proponents say will replace Teztan Biny – could not begin to meet DFO's requirements for "no net loss," that the impacts on endangered grizzly bears would be cumulative and irreversible, and that navigation under the Navigable Waters Protection Act would be impossible.

The report stated that the mine would permanently destroy lands and waters that are an “important cultural and spiritual area” for the Tsilhqot’in people, “an important teaching environment” for Tsilhqot’in youth, an “important source of fish for their sustenance” and “a place of spiritual power and healing for the Tsilhqot’in.” It warned “the loss of the Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and Nabas areas for current use activities, ceremonies, teaching, and cultural and spiritual practices would be irreversible, of high magnitude and have a long-term effect on the Tsilhqot’in,” and that these “impacts on the physical and mental health of the Tsilhqot’in communities would be long term.”

The panel stated it did not believe that any recommendations to address issues should the project proceed “would eliminate or accommodate the significant loss First Nations would experience.”

Yet the company pursuing this project has made public statements to investors that the federal Government will indeed approve the mine and that it will do so hastily, within days, or at most two or three weeks, of Parliament return Sept. 20. The company also told investors that outstanding court cases regarding our unceded title and rights were of no concern to the company or its investors and that once the mine was approved, any findings in our favour would be the government’s “problem.”

Such comments have raised concerns that the proponents believe the federal Government had predetermined it would support the project regardless of the findings of the CEAA panel. Unfortunately, to date we have yet to receive any reply to our attempts to communicate our concerns to the Minister of the Environment or the federal government’s BC caucus, and are turning to you in the hope that the official Opposition will take a stand to defend the honour of the Crown, both in its responsibility to First Nations and to the environment.

Significant efforts have been made by the Province and the company to minimise the importance of our sacred lake – a beautiful, pristine important trout-bearing wilderness lake that has been featured in BC tourism pamphlets. We can assure you it is not, to quote BC Mining, Energy and Petroleum Resources Minister Bill Bennett, “a shallow, mucky pond,” and we invite you to come to our territory to see for yourself what is at stake.

There has also been an extensive public campaign to persuade the public to support the proposed mine by claiming great economic benefits. These claims do not stand up to close scrutiny.

There is no evidence that the dollar figures provided by the company have been independently assessed by the BC government, but the Province and the federal Government are fully aware of other analysis that demonstrates the figures used to promote this project are grossly exaggerated and were not subjected to accepted accounting methodology. This analysis demonstrates that, when all costs are factored in and realistic estimates of revenues are assessed, the net cost to British Columbia will be at least \$20 million a year to support this proposed mine. The claimed job creation figures are also grossly inflated and would not appear to have much effect on local unemployment. We are confident enough of the accuracy of this analysis that we believe an objective independent review would demonstrate its validity.

The grounds for rejecting this mine are so clear, and the process and tactics that have been used to develop and promote this proposed project are so inflammatory, that First Nations and First

Nations organizations across British Columbia and throughout Canada are now unified in their determination to defend against the project proceeding.

As we have noted repeatedly in our attempts to communicate with the government on this matter, our concerns and the united determination of First Nations to fight this project should not be underestimated. As we made clear in a recent news release, attempts by the Province to buy First Nations support for this project will not work. Our future and our culture are at stake and are not for sale – they cannot be bought.

The Assembly of First Nations chiefs, in a resolution last month pledging to help the Tsilhqot'in defend their land, advised the federal Government that: *"First Nations across Canada are watching its decision to see whether there remains any value or integrity in environmental assessments for major projects, or whether First Nations must turn to litigation and other means to assert our rights and protect our cultures."*

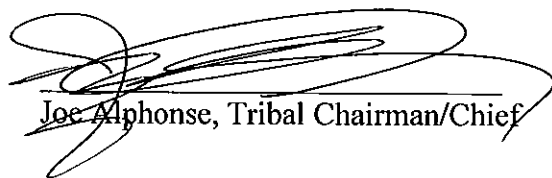
The chiefs also cautioned the federal Government that: *"Approval of the proposed Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine, despite the clear warnings of its independent Panel, would demonstrate utter disregard for the survival of First Nations as distinctive cultures within Canada."*

We also have the personal support of National Chief Shawn Atleo, the BC AFN, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the BC First Nations Summit, the BC First Nations Leadership Council and other leadership groups and individual First Nations in BC and Canada.

We are now calling on you to take a stand and to help us make sure that the Conservative government is aware of the severity of the situation and understands the importance of rejecting this proposed mine based on the findings the CEEA panel report, the Constitutional duty to First Nations and adherence to environmental laws and principles.

We repeat our invitation for you and members of you BC caucus to visit with us and see what it is at stake. We also invite to view the video *Blue Gold* at <http://vimeo.com/9679174>, and Alice William's video *A Tsilhqot'in Treasure of Rivers and Lakes* at <http://vimeo.com/13704214>. We hope that, unlike the Conservative members to whom we have written to date, you will not ignore our letter and will instead respond in a timely fashion.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chairman/Chief

CC: Members of the BC Federal Liberal Caucus: Sen. Mobina Jaffer, Sen. Larry Campbell; The Hon. Hedy Fry; The Hon Ujjal Dosanjh; The Hon. Keith Martin; Sukh Dhaliwal; Joyce Murray.

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