



For Immediate Release

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No More New Bitumen Mines!

We have many unacknowledged environmental and human health impacts from existing bitumen mines, with currently over a billion cubic metres of toxic tailings. Keepers of the Athabasca is one of the intervenors working hard to stop a proposal for the biggest bitumen mine yet, and the furthest north, using all of the same old polluting technology as the other ones. We cross examined Teck Resources Inc.'s team on September 27 and 28, and gave our direct evidence on October 4, 2018 in Fort McMurray. Here is some of what our experts had to say (more in Transcripts, enclosed)

“I am here today to protect my future generations... I am most likely one of very few survivors that still has oral history instilled in me. I am also most likely of very few Dene women that has travelled to the Barren Lands for caribou as my father has a young man with his father, and his father with my great-grandfather... We, too, are becoming at the risk of becoming a species at risk ... Where are all those papers that we signed onto stating our concerns? Who got rid of them? Are they sitting in some shelf in somebody's office? This is the kind of disrespect for our Indigenous women. We are the carriers of life - life givers for all humanity. We carry our children in our wombs filled with water, every one of you have come from a woman; every one of you was born with water and are now endangered as a First Nations Dene peoples.”
Jean L'Hommecourt, Indigenous Knowledge holder and Keepers' Co-chair

“They (Alberta Cancer Board) identified a 30% higher rate of cancer in Fort Chip, which contradicted what Health Canada had said ... The community was up in arms and with one voice said, “We are not alarmed by what Dr. O'Connor is saying. We realize we have experienced this high cancer and increasing cancer numbers in our community and other illnesses. We were alarmed by the fact that people were ignoring us. We are now relieved that Dr. O'Connor has become our voice.”

Dr. John O'Connor, expert witness

“Currently it is known that leachate is reaching the Athabasca River, but poor data collection and inadequate data sharing prevent informing the public and local communities as to the extent of this groundwater problem. Groundwater flows from under the tailing ponds to discharge into the Athabasca River. The problem can only get worse with the expansion of existing facilities or approval of new tailing ponds.”

Dr. Gilles Wendling, supporting groundwater expert

“Another large mining operation with business-as-usual technology cannot be approved without causing regional ecological disaster. Studies clearly show there is no more room for added air pollution, in fact they show that the current emissions will need to be cut dramatically to prevent collapse, first of lake ecosystems, and the forests later, in an area the size of Germany across Northern Canada.”

Paul Belanger, Keepers Co-chair

“Teck Resources makes inappropriate use of large, own risk discount rates to minimize the balance sheet impacts of its vast environmental liabilities, it does not publicly report sufficient data to allow a detailed evaluation of its environmental liability management, and the company has not properly planned to fund the eventual retirement of its significant global liabilities. This leaves the public at extreme risk of inheriting very significant environmental liabilities, virtually guaranteed to exceed the economic benefit it derives from Teck’s proposed bitumen mine.”

Regan Boychuk, expert witness

“Teck has stated that the Project should be approved because it will yield net benefits to society. The determination of whether a project will have net benefits requires a comprehensive and transparent accounting of costs alongside benefits. While Teck’s application does provide estimates of private costs – costs to the company itself – they do not provide an accounting of external or social costs.”

Dr. Gerda Kits, expert witness

While the hearing continues until October 27, 2018, the Joint Review Panel denied our Motion to bring two AER witnesses forward. We know that the AER has a ‘non-public’ assessment of the amount of liabilities now held by Albertans when it comes to bitumen mines and their tailing ponds. For public consumption, we know that approximately 5% (or \$1.39B) security is being held of the \$27.79B current liabilities for bitumen production in Alberta. We know that the AER’s ‘non-public’ estimate is many times larger than the ‘public’ assessment.

In denying our Motion to call these AER witnesses, the Joint Review Panel responded: “The Panel is not persuaded that the information sought regarding the scale of Alberta’s unfunded environmental liabilities is necessary or critical in order for the Panel to carry out and fulfill its mandate.” This is a disturbing state of affairs; how will the public ever find out the AER’s real estimate of liabilities to Albertans? How can decisions affecting all of us be made without the real liability estimate?

These un-funded liabilities are piled onto the Redwater decision, a court case that removed producers’ financial responsibility for remediation in Alberta if they go bankrupt (a synopsis is enclosed). Keepers of the Athabasca is currently working on developing a new tool with communities to enable data visualization about where tailings ponds are leaking. Approving more bitumen mines could be a financial, environmental, and health disaster for Albertans.

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