

Government of Nunavut – August 27, 2010

Response to Petition to hold a Public Inquiry into the Wisdom of Allowing Uranium Mining in Nunavut

Presented By: Ron Elliott (MLA for Quttiktuq)

Date Presented: June 8, 2010

Petition Number: 005-3(2)

Responder: Hon. Eva Aariak, Premier,
Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs

Date of Response: August 11, 2010

Title: Petition to hold a Public Inquiry into the Wisdom of Allowing Uranium Mining in Nunavut

Thank you for tabling your petition requesting that a public inquiry be held on the issue of uranium mining in Nunavut.

The Government of Nunavut acknowledges that Nunavummiut may have questions, opinions or concerns about uranium mining projects proposed in our territory. We take the issue very seriously and we want to ensure that mining is undertaken in Nunavut with the least possible risk to human health and the environment.

The Government of Nunavut believes that the existing Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) regulatory process as set out in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement is a comprehensive, inclusive and effective means of evaluating mining projects in Nunavut on a case by case basis. The review process is ideally suited to identifying and assessing areas of concern raised by people and communities nearest to the intended development project.

Furthermore, the uranium mining industry is unique in that there is an existing federal regulatory body – the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission – that scrutinizes these types of operations to ensure that the highest possible standards for human health and environmental protection are met.

The Government of Nunavut has also convened an interdepartmental working group to coordinate a study to be done this fall by an environmental consulting firm. The study will provide accurate and objective information on uranium mining in Nunavut. To inform that work, Nunavummiut will be invited later this year to a public forum where they can express their views, get information, and share their concerns specifically about

uranium development. We will endeavour to make this forum as accessible as possible to Nunavummiut, including but not limited to those most immediately impacted by projects currently in the regulatory process.

We have chosen the flexibility and inclusiveness of a public forum rather than the rigidity of a public inquiry. Our objective is to consult Nunavummiut in an informal, yet structured and informed setting where everyone has the opportunity to express his

or her views openly. Under the Public Inquiries Act, hearings would be open to the public to attend, but only people with a substantial and direct interest will be allowed to express their views. In addition, while that Act gives a Board broad powers in the conduct of an inquiry, such as compelling witnesses to give evidence and produce documents, those rules can lead to an overly onerous process and less time for members of the public to openly share their concerns.

While the Government of Nunavut will not hold an inquiry under the Public Inquiries Act, we trust that the existing regulatory processes and the public forum to be held later this year, in addition to the comprehensive work the Government of Nunavut has embarked on, will give everyone an opportunity to voice their concerns.