

## **Baffinland starts process to lay off up to 1,328 employees in Nunavut**

### ***Letter to Nunavut government gives notice of mass terminations starting Aug. 31***

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Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation intends to lay off up to 1,328 employees – including 209 Inuit – later this year, according to a notice the company served to the Nunavut government.

The letter, dated June 3, says the mass terminations are expected between Aug. 31 and Oct. 31.

However, Joseph Tigullaraq, the head of northern affairs at Baffinland, said Monday afternoon that the company is still working to get approval from the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) to continue shipping six million tonnes of ore from its Mary River mine this year to prevent the layoffs.

The company, he said, is "doing everything we can in our ability to keep everybody on."

"We do have to put in notice of layoff to the Nunavut Labour Standards Compliant Office — that does not mean employees will be laid off immediately," he said.

Tigullaraq said it's a standard procedure under the Labour Act that the company was required to file last Friday.

The layoff notice stems from the rejection of an extension of Baffinland's temporary approval to ship six million tonnes of ore from its Mary River mine, from a previous cap of 4.2 million tonnes. The temporary approval to up its production was given in 2018, but it expired at the end of 2021.

The extension to its increased production was part of its Phase 2 proposal that was being reviewed by the Nunavut Impact Review Board. In May however, the NIRB recommended that Baffinland's Phase 2 expansion proposal be denied, noting concerns of potentially "significant adverse ecosystemic effects" on marine mammals, fish, caribou and other wildlife, which in turn could harm Inuit culture, land use and food security.

Baffinland said the deadline of its production increase extension was meant to fall after the Phase 2 process was done, but due to "a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorization expired before the process concluded."

The mining company had asked the federal government on May 20 to "clarify" that the shipping limit could be extended until the end of the year, but that was denied, with Northern Affairs Minister Daniel Vandal saying he had no such authority.

Baffinland sent a second request on May 26 to Vandal asking him to act under the emergency provisions of the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act, but Vandal denied that request last week.

Instead, the department encouraged Baffinland to work with the review board and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA).

Tigullaraq said Baffinland is working with the QIA in "coming up with a resolution" to help solve "issues" that he said could help get the extension approved.

"That is what we're working on now," Tigullaraq said. "We're doing our very best to make sure that we don't need to get into laying people off."

He said it's possible to have the layoff letter rescinded if the company is approved to ship six million tonnes of ore for the year.

### ***Cap for the year already reached, company says***

Baffinland said in its June termination notice to the territorial government's Labour Standards Compliance Office, that re-scaling its operations to 4.2 million tonnes "cannot be done smoothly mid-year," and that the cap has already been reached.

Instead, the company writes, "Baffinland will need to drastically reduce its workforce."

The letter was penned by Tayfun Eldem, the group executive vice-president of operations and growth for Baffinland.

The letter says the NIRB's recommendation has caused "significant uncertainty" for the company's operations and that it could experience significant revenue loss.

In the letter, it said "while Baffinland continued to pay Nunavummiut who were sent home during the COVID-19 pandemic, Baffinland cannot provide similar support at this time due to the significant revenue reduction it will experience at reduced shipping levels."

Tigullaraq said he didn't have the exact figure as to how much loss that would be.

Last Thursday, David Akeeagok, Nunavut's minister of environment, economic development and transportation, said the government was preparing for these layoffs by ensuring all the programs to support people who lose their jobs, are being used.

On Monday, he said the notice increased the urgency to do so.

"It does give more of a definitive date, which would expedite some of the work that we need to do from our end whenever there's mass layoffs," Akeeagok said. "As a government, we need to be ready."

### ***Baffinland should 'work better with Inuit' going forward, says MP***

Nunavut MP Lori Idlout told CBC News Monday that she thinks Baffinland should have been more prepared for whatever recommendations the NIRB made.

"They should ensure that their employer is making better plans to protect their employees over profits," she said.

Idlout said she's heard "most people are pleased" with the NIRB's recommendation to not approve Phase 2.

"[People] are pleased that Inuit knowledge needs to be used and that the adverse impact to the wildlife and to the environment are too great that we need to do better to protect the environment," Idlout said.

Idlout said "it is unfortunate that Baffinland is using these tactics," and that she thinks the company is using the layoffs "as a way to garner support to continue to damage the environment.

"And to continue to use ... impacts to employment as a way to scare Inuit organizations and Inuit, so that they could pit Inuit against each other."

Going forward, Idlout hopes Baffinland will "work better with Inuit" if the company wants to continue its project.

And "that they do it in a stronger relationship with Inuit so that Inuit feel heard, that Inuit are part of the decision making process, and that there is able to be economic development that respects the rights of harvesters, that respect the rights of Inuit."