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Subject: comments on White's Point Quarry Proposal
From: "Michelle Bull"
Date: Wed, June 20, 2007 7:15 pm
To: comments@wpq-jointreview.ca

To the Joint Review Panel,

Re. White's Point Quarry.

Dear Panel Members:

I am writing to you regarding the proposed basalt quarry at White's Point.

I am a summer person on Digby Neck and have been holidaying there for 24 years. My husband's family has been going to Sandy Cove since about 1933.

Our family owns land on the neck, in Sandy Cove and Lake Midway and family members live on the Neck year round. I live in the Annapolis Valley, close to the North Mountain which also has reserves of basalt. I have a number of concerns about this quarry and its likely impact on various aspects of life on Digby Neck and other parts of Nova Scotia.

Re. Economics: I understand that, while Digby Neck is to me a holiday home, other people live there year round and must be permitted to make a living. My concern about this quarry is that it is likely to actually reduce the number of jobs on Digby Neck. Even if Bilcon provides the number of jobs it says it will, and even if all those jobs went to residents of the Neck (which is most unlikely), I believe that the deleterious effects of the quarry on the fisheries and on ecotourism are likely to reduce jobs in those sectors by more than the number of jobs added in the quarry.

While I am not an expert on the fisheries, I understand that the effects of constant lights at the site are likely to affect the herring fisheries.

No one knows what impact the blasting is likely to have on other fish and lobster. There is likely to be run off which will have an effect on the waters of the Bay of Fundy. Furthermore, if water ballast is used in the ships coming to collect the basalt, that water will be released into the Bay of Fundy and could contain organisms which could have a negative impact on the fisheries.

One doesn't have to be an expert in the area of ecotourism to know that ecotourists go to places with beautiful unspoiled scenery. They are most unlikely to wish to take their holidays within sight or sound of the quarry. Ecotourism is a growing industry on Digby Neck with many whale watching businesses and spin-off businesses (such as campgrounds, inns, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, craft stores, etc.). This industry has the potential to be seriously injured or even destroyed by the presence of a massive basalt quarry.

Re. Environmental Concerns: It is unclear exactly what effects the presence of a quarry at White's Cove might have on the environment, but other examples show that these effects could be serious. It is my opinion that where something has not been proven to be safe, or at least likely to be safe, then the precautionary principle should take effect and we should not allow that activity.

The Bay of Fundy is home to many whales, including highly endangered right whales. It is our responsibility to protect these endangered mammals.

Having extra shipping coming through the Bay of Fundy increases the risk of collisions with right whales. We cannot afford even one such collision.

It is also unclear what effect the blasting will have on the whales, who would certainly be able to hear it. It might well affect them so much that they leave their best feeding grounds and go elsewhere. (This would also have a negative impact on the ecotourism industry). It might simply put them off their breeding, another possible ill effect.

I understand that there are rare species of flowers at the quarry site itself which could be endangered by changing drainage, increased wind and dust. While we don't know that the flowers would be unable to survive, we also don't know that they would be able to. Bilcon's response to these questions does not lead us to believe that they care greatly either way.

Run off has already been documented at the proposed quarry site and would likely be increased if the quarry were actually to be approved. This could have a negative impact on the surrounding waters, besides the damage done by the erosion itself.

Bilcon has not established to anyone's satisfaction but their own that the blasting associated with the quarry would not change the underground aquifers which currently provide local wells and wetlands. This could have an immense impact not only on people's water supply but also on the established water table and natural water supplies to the vegetation on the Neck.

There is a great deal of concern these days over greenhouse gases. Bilcon has not explained how it would keep the production of these to a minimum.

I believe their attitude is that since there's no law against it they don't have to worry. This is not good enough.

Re. Quality of Life Issues: I come to Digby Neck each summer because it is a beautiful relatively unspoiled area. We picnic on the beaches, walk in the woods, visit with neighbours, both summer people and permanent residents, participate in the community and generally relax and enjoy the quiet life. All this is threatened by the quarry, which will destroy the peace and quiet with blasting and also with constant truck traffic on the one road. My family's enjoyment of this magical place is threatened. Other more sensible and suitable economic development does not in any way threaten it. The fisheries and ecotourism have not threatened it. In fact, they enhance it. But a major quarry is out of place on a thin strip of land in this quiet area.

I remember when Irving was logging some areas on the Neck. The sound of their chain saws and equipment seriously impaired our enjoyment of the summer there, and the enjoyment of permanent residents. I am afraid that with blasting and the traffic of trucks up and down the Neck, our enjoyment of the peace and quiet of Digby Neck would be impaired for the next 50 years.

Dust has also been identified as a concern. I am afraid that dust from the blasting would not be contained and would fall on our property, making it much harder to enjoy the unspoiled beauty of the Cove.

I also worry that our water supply might be dried up if the blasting changed any of the aquifers.

Re. Justice Issues: I do not see why a foreign company should be able to buy up land in our province, without necessarily telling people why they were buying it, and then decide to establish a quarry which is chiefly of benefit to their own company, and against the wishes of the local community. The community will receive no real benefits. No royalties are paid, very little tax would be collected. There might be some jobs but there might also be job losses. Many of the jobs would go to people with experience in the field, which would eliminate most current residents of the Neck. Why should the local community have no say over what sort of "economic development" happens in its neighbourhood? No one is against economic development or jobs, but not jobs that take away other jobs and not jobs that ruin the neighbourhood for people who have lived there for decades. Nova Scotia ought to have laws protecting its coastline from such foreign depredations.

It has also been explained to me than once we start shipping basalt to New Jersey for concrete, we cannot reduce the amount shipped under the terms of NAFTA. This means that the whole North Mountain could be under threat and the American company could then have a legal right to the very ground we walk on. This is simply wrong.

Re. Miscellaneous Concerns: It is my understanding that there is an old graveyard at White's Point. While there may no longer be proper markers or a fenced area, local people remember the graveyard. Proper care must be taken not to disturb the rest of these pioneers.

Any claims by First Nations peoples to the area in question must be taken very seriously. White people, especially foreign white people, have made enough inroads into the lands and rights of our native people. This must not be permitted.

In conclusion, experts in various areas have raised serious concerns about the negative impact of a quarry at White's Point. Bilcon has not answered these concerns and has not explained properly why they think the quarry should be permitted to go ahead, except for a promise of jobs. It seems that the great advantage of our basalt over American basalt is that our laws protecting our coastline and our environment are not as strong as American laws. This is something that our politicians need to rectify.

However, in the absence of stronger laws we do have the environmental assessment process and it is my opinion that the panel ought to hold to the highest environmental standards, even if they are not fully protected yet by law. It is also my opinion that the burden of proof

should rest on Bilcon to prove that the quarry will not have a negative impact on the environment. If they cannot show conclusively, or even on the strongest balance of probability, that their proposal is environmentally safe, then they should not be permitted to proceed, under the precautionary principle, even if others cannot conclusively prove that it is not safe.

I urge the panel to refuse permission to Bilcon to build a basalt quarry on Digby Neck.

Sincerely yours,

Michelle Bull,