

Linda Leon

March 26th 2015

Here is part of the introduction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, (YESAA).

“The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, (YESAB) was established under the Yukon Environmental Socio-economic Assessment Act, (YESAA), which came into effect May 13th, 2003. YESAA sets out a process to assess environmental and socio-economic effects of proposed projects and other activities in or that might effect Yukon. This is a requirement of Chapter 12 of the Umbrella Final Agreement and Yukon First Nations’ Final Agreements.”

YESAA is a carefully written document that respects First Nations, non-native citizens, the business community, the mining industry and future generations. The process of creating YESAA was transparent.

Bill S-6 was concocted through secret consultations between federal and territorial representatives and the mining community. First Nations were allowed to sit at the table but, if Grand Chief Massie of the Council of Yukon First Nations is to be believed, their input was ignored. The public was not informed of the process nor was it welcome at the table.

Bill S-6 lacks the clarity of YESAA and is filled with gobbledygook thereby creating weasel room, which would permit vested interest groups to make self-serving interpretations.

Amendments to Section 43(6) of the YESAA, allow new proposals by resource extraction industries to be covered by old assessment requirements regardless of the size or scope of the new projects.

Bill S-6 changes regulatory authority in Yukon. As a check and balance, YESAB was set up to be arms length from the territorial government and, by extension, pressure from vested interest groups. Bill S-6 allows “the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with the authority to provide binding policy direction to the Yukon Environmental Socio-economic Assessment Board”. This subverts YESAA, the Umbrella Final Agreement and Yukon First Nations’ Final Agreements, which are interconnected. Giving authority to the federal government is a sideways maneuver to strip YESAB of its immunity from influence.

Reasonable people would endorse Bill S-6 if they thought that it truly helped "improve the environmental review process." However, there is little in Bill S-6 to support that idea. As it pertains to Yukon, nothing directly addresses time delays for assessments. It merely removes the need for oversight of additional projects and allows a federal minister to override YESAB.

Bill S-6 will make the resource extraction industry less accountable for their actions thereby creating wealth at the expense of the environment and the social well being of all Northerners.

When one vested interest has the ear of government and the majority of citizens are snubbed, we should be concerned about the impartiality of our governments.

This bill is regressive. Please throw Bill S-6 back into the garbage can it came from.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Leon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'L'.

Linda Leon