

Final hearings extended for Nunavut mine expansion

Nunavut Impact Review Board runs out of time to finish Mary River hearings this week

[Beth Brown](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 03, 2021 4:30 AM CT | Last Updated: February 3



Kaviq Kaluraq is chair of the Nunavut Impact Review Board. On Tuesday, she announced that the environmental hearings about an expansion of the Mary River mine, originally scheduled to end this week, will be extended into March. (Submitted by the Nunavut Impact Review Board)

Environmental hearings for an expansion of the Mary River Mine on north Baffin Island are being extended, again.

An additional hearing is now being planned for March, the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) announced Tuesday, after a two-week technical meeting being held in Iqaluit and Pond Inlet fell a week behind schedule,

"The board is planning to hold the extended session in Iqaluit and plans to bring together up to five community representatives representing the hamlet, hunters and trappers organization, women, youth and elders from each of the seven communities, including representatives from Pond Inlet, all together in one venue," said Kaviq Kaluraq, chair of the review board, when announcing the schedule changes.

The extension will allow any outstanding questions from intervener groups and the public to be entered onto the hearing record, she said.

- [Mary River expansion hearings open to opposition from Nunavut communities](#)
- [Nunavut mine expansion won't harm narwhals or seals, company says](#)

The Mary River expansion is the largest resource development project currently being proposed in Nunavut. Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation wants to double production of the iron ore mine so it can ship 12 million tonnes from Milne Port each year.

To do that, it plans to build a railway that would run through caribou habitat, and increase shipping in water bodies that are part of Tallurutiup Imanga, or Lancaster Sound. The waters near Milne Port are a primary summer home for the world's largest population of narwhal.

The Mary River expansion was first proposed in 2014, but has seen many changes over the course of these negotiations. Much of the information being covered this week is new to the communities who will be impacted by increased mining.

The final environmental hearings have been happening for over two years, with multiple delays.

The company said it supports the board's efforts to conclude the hearings.

"The Nunavut Impact Review Board's decision yesterday makes clear that both the technical hearing and community roundtable sessions will come to a conclusion as soon as logistics permit," Baffinland president Brian Penney said in a statement to CBC News.

Dates for the March hearings have yet to be decided, the NIRB said.

Hunters say Inuit have a right to oral consultation

The hearing extension comes after hunters from Pond Inlet made a motion for more time, stating Inuit have the right to oral consultation.

"Inuit culture is an oral culture and the ability to communicate questions about the project to Baffinland orally is of significant importance to Inuit," the Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Association (MHTO) said in an oral motion delivered Jan. 30. "Further, oral questions allow for the ability to follow up and ask questions to clarify responses."

When the technical hearings began to fall behind schedule last week, the NIRB started limiting the number of questions and follow up responses parties could ask the mine. It also asked parties to provide further questions in writing.

The MHTO says this sudden change was a "breach of procedural fairness" that curtailed Inuit's ability to "meaningfully" participate.

The group says it is not getting answers from Baffinland through first responses, and needs to be able to ask follow up questions.

- [Participants at Nunavut mine hearing question whether process is serving Inuit](#)
- [Igloodik leaders say Inuit face barriers in Nunavut mine environmental review](#)

While the hearings are being run by the NIRB, the final decision whether to allow or not the expansion will be made by the federal government.

The hunters say if they aren't given enough time to speak, then Canada will make a decision that will impact Inuit communities for generations without meaningful input from Inuit.

The review board says its job is to assess the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of development as mandated by the Nunavut Agreement, but it isn't responsible for making sure the federal government fulfills a constitutional obligation to consult with Inuit.

The board also says it doesn't have time to allow unlimited questions, so any outstanding questions will still need to be asked in writing. Baffinland will respond to written questions before the next meeting in March, so parties can ask for clarity at that time.



A view of Milne Port. If an expansion is approved, Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation will build a railway to the port and increase shipping from it. (Submitted by Baffinland iron Mines Corporation)

What the new agenda looks like

This week was going to be used for a week-long community round table, where members of the public could ask questions of the mine and the hamlets and hunters groups who are taking part in the hearing.

Now, the board has reserved all of Saturday for residents in Pond Inlet to ask their questions. In March, there will be another opportunity for members of the public to give their feedback.

So far, only Baffinland has made presentations. On Thursday and Friday, interveners from the impacted communities will present their evidence to the board.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/final-hearings-extended-for-nunavut-mine-1.5898382>

The reviews board says it recognizes the hardship faced by communities who are trying to adapt to virtual meetings and wearing masks during the pandemic.

"The panel misses seeing people interacting during coffee breaks, or seeing everyone out exploring Pond Inlet, and we also miss seeing everyone's faces under our masks," Kaluraq said. "But none of us know when it will be possible to return to those practices and the board's decision making cannot be delayed indefinitely."

To watch the proceedings virtually, the public can contact the NIRB for a link to the hearings on zoom. The hearings are also being streamed live on the Uvagut TV and Isuma TV websites. Cable subscribers can watch on the Uvagut TV channel.