

Socio-economic considerations

Mining and its related activities can have broad social and economic impacts, both positive and negative. It can lead to improved roads and infrastructure and create many well-paying jobs. It can also put pressure on social services and can increase the cost of living by creating additional demands for materials, services and labour. As well, workplace violence and harassment can disproportionately impact Indigenous people, women and gender and sexual minorities. Workers from Yukon communities can find the pressures of working in the mining sector contributes to substance use and increased stress within families.

In recent years, several Yukon-specific initiatives have examined the socio-economic effects of mining. A few of these initiatives include:

- “Never Until Now: Indigenous and racialized women’s experiences working in Yukon and northern British Columbia mine camps” published by the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society;
- “Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ people Strategy” published by the Yukon Advisory Committee on MMIWG2S+; and
- Yukon Mineral Development Strategy and Recommendations produced by an independent panel.

Through these initiatives and the ongoing work to develop new minerals legislation, we have heard how mining has fundamentally changed the lives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, communities and cultures. Communities and individuals continue to experience mining’s lasting effects today.

We know that the mineral exploration, placer mining and quartz mining sectors are significant positive contributors to the Yukon’s economy, and that these sectors currently represent approximately 14% of Yukon’s economy. In the past, boom and bust cycles associated with quartz mines and exploration have created periods of economic growth and prosperity for segments of Yukon society, followed by periods of economic downturn and slower growth. The periods of economic contraction (the “bust” part of the boom and bust cycle) have historically resulted in closing or abandonment of Yukon mine sites, which has resulted in abrupt downturns in local and regional economies, and significant environmental liabilities falling to government, some which remain today. Compared to quartz mines and exploration, the economic contributions from the placer mining sector are typically more stable over time.



Community-level socio-economic impacts are complex: some are clearly negative or positive, while others result in both positive benefits and negative impacts. For instance, new road infrastructure from mining activity can improve access for land-based activities, but increased access can also negatively affect Indigenous traditional activities and harvesting areas. In addition, socio-economic effects may be experienced differently by different segments of Yukon society. Mining projects often provide benefits to communities through employment, business opportunities and infrastructure improvements (e.g., roads and energy), and the economies of some communities in the Yukon are very strongly linked to mining. At the same time, mining projects can also put pressure on social infrastructure such as health services, emergency response and childcare. The additional demand for materials, services, labour and energy from mining projects can increase the overall cost of living across the Yukon, and may also reduce the availability of key services.

At an individual and family level, we know how impacts experienced in the workplace, such as violence, harassment and abuse, can disproportionately affect Indigenous people, women and gender and sexual minorities. Further, the individual and family-level effects of working in the mining sector (e.g., life at mining camps, fly-in/fly-out schedules and financial stressors) can contribute to substance use and increase stress within families.

Project assessments by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board have resulted in a number of recommendations intended to address negative socio-economic impacts like those described above. While this list is not exhaustive, socio-economic considerations raised in project assessments have included: economic dependency on mining; employment, education and training; personal and community health, safety and well being; infrastructure and services; heritage and culture; and traditional land uses and economies.

Interests

We want to create avenues to both understand and address the socio-economic impacts of mining. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that a new regime minimizes negative socio-economic impacts and maximizes socio-economic benefits.



Potential approaches

The potential approaches below were developed in the context of discussions about new minerals legislation. However, we recognize socio-economic effects can be broad and connected to many interrelated issues, systems and structures. Fully addressing these effects will likely take a coordinated approach and sustained effort by various parties and we know that some of tools and solutions to address them are likely outside the scope of new minerals legislation.

Agreements

Agreements involving mining companies and governments (Indigenous and public) could be one way to address socio-economic impacts and increase benefits. These types of agreements could address topics such as employment, training, and education, and could be structured in different ways. For instance, some agreements may involve project proponents, while agreements that address community infrastructure and service needs may be more appropriately made between Indigenous and public governments.

Engagement

Projects of a certain scale could be required to engage affected Indigenous groups, communities and stakeholders. This could help identify socio-economic impacts and potential mitigations. Public engagement by government could also be required for some projects.

Information requirements

New legislation could require that proponents submit socio-economic information when applying for a permit or license. This could include a record of community and stakeholder engagement conducted by the proponent, and any modifications to projects made to address impacts or interests.

Monitoring and reporting

New legislation could require monitoring and reporting of socio-economic effects by proponents, using indicators such as community health, housing availability/affordability, income and employment, education and training, and safety and crime.

Consideration during regulatory reviews

New legislation could require regulators to consider the socio-economic effects of a project during regulatory reviews. Although consideration of socio-economic effects is currently required, more specific direction could be provided in a new regime. For example, the regulator



could be required to consider both positive and negative socio-economic effects, or even specific socio-economic matters.

Background

Currently, the *Placer Mining Act* and *Quartz Mining Act* refer to socio-economic values in the purpose of the legislation as follows:

“to ensure the development and viability of a sustainable, competitive and healthy [placer/quartz] mining industry that operates in a manner that upholds the essential socio-economic and environmental values of the Yukon and respects the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.”

The legislation also directs government to review proposed projects to determine if a project will result in any adverse environmental or socio-economic effects, and if so, whether the project as described will appropriately mitigate any adverse effects. If further mitigations are required, the regulator can impose conditions when issuing an authorization.

In addition to the current legislation, the assessment of projects under the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* is important to consider in the context of socio-economic effects. YESAA defines socio-economic effects as “effects on economies, health, culture, traditions, lifestyles and heritage resources.” The assessment process identifies the socio-economic effects of a proposed project, and when adverse socio-economic effects are determined to be significant, YESAB makes recommendations for mitigating and/or monitoring those effects. Decision bodies must respond to recommendations from the assessment process, although it can be challenging to address or implement some types of socio-economic recommendations under the authority provided by the current minerals legislation.



Questions

13.1 Do you think the approaches we're considering will help provide additional avenues to address impacts and provide benefits related to projects? Please explain.

13.2 Do you have any thoughts or concerns about the approaches we're considering, or additional things that you think we should consider?

13.3 How important are the following to you:

- addressing socio-economic impacts in new minerals legislation
- monitoring socio-economic impacts over the life of a project

Please explain.

13.4 What socio-economic impacts do you think the legislation should speak to or that government should be required to consider when reviewing a project?

