

January 21, 2021

Regional Assessment in the RING OF FIRE Area
Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
160 Elgin Street, 22nd floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H3
Telephone: 613-808-0165

Re: Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area

Dear Miss Myles,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area. The Ontario Mining Association (OMA) works to support and improve the competitiveness of the mining sector in the province, while representing companies engaged in the environmentally responsible exploration, production and processing of minerals. Our members strive for a balance between serving local communities and the economic needs of the province by remaining competitive on global markets, and protecting the natural environment to ensure a sustainable future. The OMA has a long history of working in concert with the government and other partners to achieve these vital and often challenging goals. Our sector is proud of achievements on a number of fronts, including:

- Ontario is one of the safest mining jurisdictions in the world and mining is one of the safest industries in Ontario, achieving a 96% improvement in lost time injury frequency over the past 30 years;
- Mining creates more economic value for the energy it uses than most other industries, and with lower GHG emissions;
- Mining is the largest private sector employer of Indigenous Canadians, who make up about 6% of the total mining labour force compared to 3% of the Canadian population. In Ontario, Indigenous employment accounts for 11.2% of total mining jobs;
- The sector's adoption of advanced green technologies has been above the Ontario average; and,
- The minerals and metals produced by Ontario's mining industry constitute key raw materials for goods that we rely on in our daily lives and for advanced, clean technologies.

In his [Speech from the Throne](#) in September 2020, Prime Minister Trudeau spoke of the future importance of the mining industry, stating: *"A good example of adapting to a carbon-neutral future is building zero-emissions vehicles and batteries. **Canada has the resources – from nickel to copper – needed for these clean technologies. This – combined with Canadian expertise – is Canada's competitive edge.**"* The Ring of Fire is one of the most significant mineral regions in Ontario and of strategic importance to building Canada's competitive advantage as a global supplier of responsibly mined critical minerals.

The Ring of Fire has mineral potential known to be worth \$60 billion and includes the largest deposit of chromite ever discovered in North America. The region also holds the potential for significant production of nickel, copper, gold and platinum. The 150 km² section of James Bay Lowland has the potential for long-term mining development on the scale of the Sudbury Basin. In 2014, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce estimated that development within the region could generate up to \$9.4 billion of gross domestic product in the first 10 years, \$2 billion in government revenue, more than \$25 billion across numerous sectors in Ontario by 2047 (this

includes \$2.7 billion in revenues for the financial services sector and \$1.2 billion for the wholesale and retail trade sectors), and create up to 5,500 jobs annually.

As we seek to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and build a more resilient economy based on cleaner, low-carbon technology, we need to find ways to enable mineral development to flourish, while still protecting the environment and the public interest. This requires a policy emphasis on sound science, pragmatic risk assessment and rigorous cost-benefit analysis to ensure that policies are never pushed beyond the point where costs exceed benefits. To this end, we encourage a balanced, rational approach to Far North regional assessment based on substantive data on the region's biodiversity, carbon sequestration potential, Indigenous cultural heritage, natural resources and mineral potential. Restricting mining activities in the Far North in the absence of this data, and focusing on conservation targets to the exclusion of development targets, has negative consequences for the region, its communities, and the province as a whole.

While Ontario's natural resource endowment was the asset that created the Ontario mining industry over 100 years ago, it is but one ingredient that has led to the province's success in mining, and mining capital and investment. Our sustainable, competitive advantage has been built on human and financial capital, a cluster of expertise that supports mining activity across the province, and a stable political and regulatory climate. The current regulatory uncertainty faced by projects in the Ring of Fire undercuts Ontario's competitive advantage and reputation for excellence in mining. Relative to other jurisdictions, Ontario is perceived by industry as less attractive than 10 years ago, citing a major drop resulting from the lack of development in the Ring of Fire region.

Mining activities in Ontario are subject to [complex environmental permitting and approval processes](#), as well as legislative requirements. Often, requirements are duplicated across ministries, as well as at the provincial-federal levels. In the current disjointed regulatory landscape, coordination and communication among the proponent, multiple ministries, and affected Indigenous communities is challenging, given the complexity of projects and the diversity of entities involved. It is also important to note that industry operates under the Mining Act – a provincial regulatory framework that assesses environmental (as well as social, health and safety) effects not only at a single point in time, as is the case with Environmental Assessments, but throughout the life of a mine. Prior to a mine receiving a permit to operate, the proponent must set out a financial assurance plan that corresponds with their closure plan - which is updated throughout the life of mine - to guarantee that there are sufficient resources to restore the site after mining is completed. The step of updating closure plans is repeated every 5 years, is a 2-to-3-year process, and will continue long after extraction is completed.

Modern mining companies take a partnership approach to community relations. However, consultation often proves to be an ambiguous process for both industry and communities, with requirements that may be applied differently depending on the location of the mine. Proponents do not have a clear process in the event that an Indigenous community says 'no' to a project or refuses to participate in the consultation process; and, since consultation is required at various stages throughout the [life of a mine](#), many Indigenous communities are facing consultation fatigue, which leads to project delays. For example: one of our members was required to obtain 12 permits within a 12-month timeline. The company was then required to consult with four neighboring Indigenous communities, which resulted in a total of 48 points of consultation with less engaged stakeholders. Moreover, each ministry at the provincial and federal levels separately determines how the duty to consult will be satisfied – an



element that contributes to a great deal of inconsistency and undermines the integrity of the Crown's consultation obligations.

Ontario's mining companies operate in a fiercely competitive and highly mobile global market, where project feasibility no longer hinges primarily on good geology. Given that Ontario is a high-wage/high-cost jurisdiction, high levels of regulatory uncertainty risk negatively affect our ability to attract capital inflows into the mining sector, which are needed for Ring of Fire development. Fundamentally, government needs to consider the actions it can take to counteract the trend of lengthening development process timelines, so all of Canada can benefit from the Ring of Fire.

Sincerely,

<Original signed by>

Chris Hodgson
Ontario Mining Association President