

Summary of Issues

15-Mile Processing Hub Project

The Summary of Issues outlines the key issues that the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) considers relevant for the federal impact assessment process for the 15-Mile Processing Hub Project (the project). The proponent's response to the Summary of Issues will support decision-making by IAAC on whether further assessment is required under section 16 of the *Impact Assessment Act*. If an assessment is required, the key issues outlined below and the proponent's response will inform the scope of the impact assessment, and the development of the Tailored Impact Statement Guidelines and plans, as appropriate.

IAAC was informed by input received to date from federal and provincial authorities, Indigenous groups, and the public on the proponent's Summary of the Initial Project Description. The proponent is encouraged to read all submissions on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry Internet site for the project (Reference Number [90533](#)).

15-Mile Minerals and Renewables Ltd. (the proponent) is required to describe how it intends to address the key issues identified below as part of the development of its project. A high-level description is sufficient. Where relevant, the proponent is encouraged to identify if the key issues will be addressed through existing legislative and regulatory frameworks (i.e., legislation or regulation), by proponent commitments to best practices, policies or standards, or both.

Key issues

Fish and Fish Habitat

- Concerns about adverse effects on fish and fish habitat in the St. Mary's and East West River Sheet Harbour watersheds due to changes in water quality from sedimentation, seepage, runoff, storm events, sediment transport from trucks on haul roads, the use of untreated contact water for dust suppression, as well as contaminant releases such as heavy metals, mercury, arsenic, cyanide, and other deleterious substances.
- Concerns about direct and indirect loss or harmful alteration, disruption, and destruction of fish and fish habitat from project infrastructure construction and operations at the 15-Mile, Old Austen, and Old Mitchell mine sites due to project activities such as open pit development, dewatering, waste rock, tailings, water extraction, effluent discharge watercourse realignment/crossings, and wetland alteration.
- Concerns about changes to hydrology at the 15-Mile, Old Austen, and Old Mitchell mine sites, including altered groundwater–surface water connectivity, flow diversion into open pits, groundwater quantity, lowered water tables, reduced groundwater discharge, and changes to ecological flows that may adversely affect fish habitat and how these changes may be worsened by climate change, drought, or flood conditions.
- Concerns about the adequacy of proposed containment and management of potential acid-generating waste rock, stormwater, and contact water at the Old Mitchell and Old Austen mine sites, including uncertainty regarding liner and containment performance of pits used for tailings, stockpile duration, contact water collection, discharge routing, extreme-weather resilience, seepage/contaminant release, and monitoring and contingency measures for adverse effects to the St. Mary's watershed and associated fish habitat under normal, worst-case, and long-term conditions.
- Concerns about adverse effects on fish habitat due to the malfunctions or accidents that lead to the release of contaminants into nearby waterbodies as well as the mobilization of contaminants due to the disturbance of existing acidic soil and vegetation that may

contain arsenic or other contaminants from historic mining materials within the project area.

- Concerns about reconnecting the open pit during decommissioning of the Old Mitchell mine site to an unknown nearby stream and any changes to seasonal and hydrological flow patterns and changes to temperature, sediment, and nutrient regimes that could adversely affect fish habitat in the St. Mary's watershed.
- Concerns about adverse effects on fish and fish habitat from the Seloam Brook realignment and uncertainties associated with the length and extent of realignment that would be required.
- Concerns about the death of fish from the use of explosives near fish habitat.
- Concerns about direct and cumulative effects on spawning, rearing, overwintering, and migration of Atlantic salmon and other cold-water species within the St. Mary's watershed including the availability and effectiveness of cold-water refugia due to changes to the hydrology of multiple watersheds, acid rock drainage, sedimentation, contaminant mobilization, effluent discharge, barriers to fish passage, and how this will hinder ongoing restoration efforts in these watersheds.
- Concerns about adverse cumulative effects on fish and fish habitat within the St. Mary's watershed from the proposed mine sites in combination with past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable activities (e.g., ongoing and historic mining, clearcutting, onshore wind, hydrogen production), including habitat loss, altered groundwater–surface water connectivity, reduced ecological flows, degraded water quality and habitat function due to project activities such as open pit development, dewatering, waste rock, tailings, effluent discharge, watercourse realignment/crossings, and wetland alteration including related offsetting needs to address such effects.
- Concerns about the unique river biodiversity in the St. Mary's River that is an Ecologically Significant Area Candidate site, particularly for Atlantic salmon, American eel, and Brook floater.

Migratory Birds

- Concerns about adverse effects on migratory birds from wetland and habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation during construction, and sensory disturbance from noise, vibration and lighting, and accidental release during operations (e.g., tailings, fuel spills, hazardous releases).

Indigenous Peoples' Current Use of Lands and Resources for Traditional Purposes

- Concern about impacts on current use, especially due to the proximity of the Old Austen mine site to the Killag River and the West River Sheet Harbour watershed. The proponent should assess water quality, fish habitat, Atlantic salmon, aquatic species at risk, and Mi'kmaq harvesting activities that may be affected by changes within the watershed.
- Concern about the effects of the project on current use within the project area of each mine site by the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia for hunting, fishing, gathering and overnight camps. Narrow focus on maintaining physical access to use areas, rather than a holistic assessment informed by Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) that gives consideration to the broader ecological conditions, food security, wildlife health, and intergenerational knowledge transfer necessary for the meaningful exercise of Mi'kmaq harvesting rights.

Indigenous Peoples' Health, Social, and Economic Conditions

- Concerns about significant gaps in Indigenous-specific health, social, and economic baseline information, including the absence of a Mi'kmaq health baseline, inadequate socio-economic data for many reserve communities, limited information on housing,

employment, health and social services, community safety, cultural continuity, mental well-being, food security, drinking water, and existing community concerns, as well as the lack of commitments to undertake comprehensive Indigenous-specific baseline studies and incorporate Mi'kmaq-led traditional food quality research, which create uncertainty in identifying pathways of effects and may hinder the assessment of the likelihood, severity and significance of potential adverse effects on Indigenous health and well-being.

- Concerns about potential impacts on Mi'kmaq health and traditional land use resulting from exposure to contaminants of potential concern associated with historical mine materials, acid rock drainage, metal leaching, and the release of arsenic and other contaminants, particularly given the overlap of the project area with Mi'kmaq traditional use lands, the proximity of Mi'kmaq communities, and the potential for exposure through air, water, country foods and land-based activities.
- Concerns about adverse effects on the environmental and socio-economic conditions, and impacts on rights of the Mi'kmaq associated with trucking routes and associated infrastructure, including their location, characteristics, and anticipated traffic volume.
- Concerns about the recognition and addressing of Millbrook First Nation's longstanding opposition to the project, which was informed by extensive consultation and the Beaver Dam Community Wellness Study. Millbrook's concerns were in relation to water quality, atmospheric dust, impacts on critical hunting grounds and mainland moose habitat, and the proximity of Beaver Lake Indian Reserve No. 17, all of which support the need for a federal review.
- Concerns about the potential impacts of the project's large and geographically dispersed workforce on Indigenous communities, particularly the heightened risk of gender-based violence affecting Indigenous women and girls, the lack of targeted mitigation measures to address community vulnerabilities and workforce-related risks, and the need to ensure safe and inclusive working and living environments for Indigenous women seeking employment or residing near the project area.
- Concerns about adequate assessment of economic participation and benefits for the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia, including procurement opportunities, Mi'kmaq employment opportunities and training commitments, resource revenue sharing, and other economic partnership discussions with Kwi'mu'kw Maw-klusuaqn's Benefits Department.

Indigenous Peoples' Spiritual, Physical and Cultural Heritage

- Concerns about the health and restoration of Atlantic salmon populations in the St. Mary's River (Napu'saqnuk), which extend beyond ecology and include the protection of Mi'kmaq culture and heritage and are located within the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, in a watershed that has supported Indigenous communities for thousands of years as a vital travel corridor, source of sustenance, and cultural landscape.
- Concerns about the proposed mining development at the Old Mitchell Mine Site, which is situated between two Mi'kmaq-supported conservation initiatives and within a known traditional use area supported by previous Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge Studies (MEKS): the Whale Sanctuary Project and the proposed Napu'saqnuk Ecologically Significant Area.
- Concerns about environmental degradation from project activities including dust, increased traffic and construction, runoff, and industrial activity that can affect culturally significant lands and species of importance to the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia such as Atlantic salmon, American eel, and Brook floater, as well as undermine existing environmental commitments, conservation objectives, and areas of significance to the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia.

- Concern for the Brook floater population within the St. Mary's watershed, one of the species' most important remaining strongholds, where mining-related effects on water quality, sedimentation, aquatic connectivity, habitat integrity and host fish populations could threaten the long-term viability of the species listed as Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act*.
- Concern about the characterization of impacts to traditional land use as temporary, despite the project's decades-long duration and potential for lasting effects on landscapes, cultural continuity, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, without methodology for assessing these long-term cultural impacts in collaboration with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.
Concern about the risk of impacts to Mi'kmaq archaeological and cultural heritage resources, including potential burial sites, given that proponent investigations are incomplete and further archaeological work should be conducted with Mi'kmaq participation.

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

- Concerns about adverse impacts to the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and their ability to exercise Section 35 Rights under the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Concerns about impacts to fishing, including but not limited to Atlantic salmon and American eel, hunting and harvesting, the loss of cultural and spiritual use of lands and waters, and health and socioeconomic conditions including food security.
- Concerns about the limited documentation currently available for review and the need for MEKS and Archaeological Resource Impact Assessments (ARIA) at each of the three proposed mine sites to properly assess impacts on Mi'kmaq Section 35 Rights, using Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs-approved providers.

Appendix – Other Comments, Advice, and Recommendations

15-Mile Processing Hub Project

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) is providing the following comments, advice, and recommendations for information purposes only. The proponent is encouraged to consult the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry Internet site for the project (Reference Number [90533](#)) to review the original comments.

Accidents and Malfunctions

- Concerns about health and environmental risks associated with gold mining including tailing storage facility failure, waste rock management, acid rock drainage and metal leaching, cyanide and processing management, long-term water treatment obligations, and closure and post-closure monitoring requirements.

Alternative Means of Carrying Out the Project/ Alternatives to the Project

- Concerns about whether various technically and economically feasible options, such as the use of best available technologies (e.g., alternatives to cyanide and dry stack tailings) and alternatives to the project, were adequately considered.

Atmospheric Emissions

- Concerns about the adverse effects on the environment and health of public users of the areas surrounding the project from changes in noise, dust, arsenic, mercury, and air quality due to project activities, including trucking.

Aquatic Species

- Concerns about downstream effects on eel grass beds.

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Concerns about energy needs and greenhouse gas emissions associated with project activities, including the lack of consideration of post-2050 greenhouse gas emissions estimates despite the project's anticipated operational activities beyond 2050, that could potentially hinder federal and provincial climate commitments and net-zero objectives.

Cumulative Effects

- Concerns about the concurrent development of multiple open pit mine sites in the region that could cumulatively affect wetlands, biodiversity, species at risk, and Mi'kmaq cultural continuity and rights, from project activities including heavy truck traffic, which could be worsened by climate change and cumulatively interact with historic gold mining operations, other active and proposed mining projects, and forestry, road building, quarrying, and other land disturbances.
- Concerns about the cumulative impact of the project on marine mammals and recovering fish populations, especially in relation to the Old Mitchell mine site.

Ecologically Sensitive Areas

- Concerns about adverse effects to protected and conserved areas in the region that contribute to biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, ecological connectivity, and watershed protection.

Assessment /Process Engagement

- Concerns about short notices, compressed timelines, and general confusion caused by project name changes that have hindered Indigenous and public engagement.
- Concerns about the regulatory environment and the need for a robust assessment process with opportunity to analyse, pose questions, assess and understand adverse environmental, health, social, and economic effects, and impacts to Indigenous peoples.
- Given Project complexity, there is a need for capacity funding for participation of Indigenous groups and the public in the project assessment and permitting.
- Should an IA be required, the establishment of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is recommended, recognizing its previous success in facilitating meaningful Mi'kmaq consultation, technical review, collaborative learning, and the application of Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) through participation by KMK, CMM, individual First Nations, and regulatory agencies.

Follow-up and monitoring

- Concerns about the uncertainties of long-term monitoring efforts need to ensure regulatory compliance during and after the life of the project.

Indigenous Consultation

- Concerns about the need for meaningful participation by Indigenous groups in the assessment of the project; respect for Mi'kmaw treaty rights; free prior and informed consent; meaningful consultation; reconciliation objectives; and the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and worldviews in decision-making, while also addressing concerns about trust stemming from past environmental compliance issues involving the proponent's parent company, St. Barbara Ltd.

Non-Indigenous Health, Social and Economic Effects

- Concern about adverse effects to human health conditions related to contamination of drinking water and food supply and increased health risks for vulnerable populations.
- Concerns about adverse social, economic, and community effects on local traffic, tourism, recreation, aquaculture, fisheries, the nearby whale sanctuary, and local ways of life, as well as uncertainty regarding the economic benefits to Nova Scotians relative to the environmental costs of gold mining.
- Concerns about adverse social, economic effects related to light, dust, noise, contaminant releases into waterways, population growth pressures on a small, aging community, and potential declines in property values.

Permitting and Authorizations

- Consult with Transport Canada to ensure compliance with the *Canadian Navigable Waters Act* (CNWA). Contact Transport Canada regarding the submission of an application for an Exemption by Order of the Governor in Council pursuant to Section 24 of the CNWA.
- Consult with NRCan to ensure compliance with the *Explosives Act*.

Project scope

- Concerns about the future scope of the project and potential to project expansions in the future that may cause or worsen the effects of the project.
- Concerns about the lack of information on the project's trucking routes and associated infrastructure, including their location and characteristics, number of trips, and the resulting inability to adequately assess the project's full footprint and potential effects on areas of federal jurisdiction, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, wildlife, fish and fish habitat, water quality, watersheds, ecosystems, cumulative effects, and risks associated with transportation incidents, accidents, and deteriorating road conditions.

Remediation of Historic Mining Sites

- Concerns about adverse effects on the environment, health, social, and economic conditions due to the mobilization of contaminants due to the disturbance of existing acidic soil and vegetation that may contain arsenic or other contaminants from historic tailings of abandoned mine sites within the project area.

Species at Risk, Terrestrial Wildlife and their Habitat

- Concerns about adverse effects on terrestrial plants, wildlife, and federal and provincial species at risk (e.g., mainland moose, boreal felt lichen, blue felt lichen, frosted glass whiskers, vole ears lichen, amphibians, birds, bats, wood turtle, snapping turtle), including injury, mortality, noise, light, water contamination, and habitat loss and fragmentation from project activities.