



7 December 2007

Honourable Minister Claude Béchar
Ministre des Ressources Naturelles et Faune
5700, 4^e Avenue Ouest, A 308
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Re: Uranium Mining in Western Quebec

Dear Minister Béchar,

We are jointly writing this open letter to you about two matters related to mining exploration in Western Quebec.

First, we have not yet received any reply to the letter and memorandum that was sent to you by Ecojustice Canada (formerly Sierra Legal) on July 10, 2007, regarding the deficiencies of Quebec's *Mining Act*. Ecojustice invested considerable time and effort to prepare this constructive correspondence and would appreciate a response.

In particular, Ecojustice emphasized the need for a comprehensive review of this statute, to ensure: 1) the clear recognition of landowners' and residents' rights; and, 2) the enhancement of municipalities' powers to make sustainable land-use planning decisions that may restrict certain mining activities for environmental, public health and safety reasons. In support of the positions presented in this previous letter, we would also like to highlight the recent release of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario's Annual Report for 2006-2007, which calls for a public and transparent review of Ontario's *Mining Act*.¹

Second, we seek further information about a group of mining claims that are held by the provincial government through SOQUEM Inc. (Société québécoise d'exploration

¹ http://www.eco.on.ca/english/newsrel/2007/Annual_report-0607-FINAL-EN.pdf



minière), and the role of SOQUEM in relation to uranium exploration in the Municipality of La Pêche. Based on publicly available information we understand that:

- SOQUEM is headquartered in Val-d'Or, and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Société générale de financement du Québec (SGF), which is established pursuant to a provincial law called the *Act respecting the Société générale de financement du Québec, R.S.Q. c. S-17*)
- SGF is an industrial and financial holding corporation of the Québec government, with an investment portfolio of nearly \$2 billion;
- SOQUEM's mission is to undertake exploration, development and mining activities throughout the province of Quebec;
- SOQUEM has contributed directly to the discovery/development of five mines in Québec (three of which are still in production today), and has previously conducted uranium exploration in the Otish Basin area and the Bear Lake area of Mont Laurier.

Furthermore, in relation to SOQUEM's mining exploration interests in Western Quebec, based on data available from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife's GESTIM database, we understand that:

- SOQUEM owns 37 claims in La Pêche which are registered to its Chibougamau regional office;
- The total area of SOQUEM's mining exploration claims in La Pêche is over 2,000 hectares (over 5,000 acres);
- SOQUEM claims are very close to the boundary of Gatineau Park (some are less than 2km away) and the majority of them are in designated wildlife habitats, including a heron breeding ground;
- All of these claims were registered between October 15 and October 18, 2007.

With respect to the above facts, our organizations have several questions that we would like you and/or other responsible Quebec ministers to answer as soon as possible:

- 1) What is the Quebec government's understanding of SOQUEM's intentions with respect to these mineral exploration claims in Western Quebec?
- 2) How are SOQUEM's exploration activities regulated by the Quebec government?
- 3) How is the Quebec government's financial interest in SOQUEM's exploration claims reconciled with the government's broader duty to protect the environment through the regulation of the mining sector?



- 4) Was the Quebec government's decision not to grant a moratorium on uranium exploration in Western Quebec (as requested by the Municipal Council of La Pêche, and supported by the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais) affected in any way by its own interests in SOQUEM's mining claims?

Yours truly,

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