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## **Growing opposition to coal export schemes**

**Patrick Brown**

A proposal to ship US Powder River Basin coal to Asia from the Lafarge docks on Texada Island, via Fraser Surrey Docks, is running into fierce questioning as a clearer picture of the implications emerges.

The coal is thermal, the lowest and cheapest grade of coal, used for electricity generation; environmental regulations limit its use within the US. (Most BC mined coal is metallurgical, used for steel production.)

New shipping facilities on the United States west coast met plan-stopping opposition in Oregon and Washington States. So shippers are becoming more ingenious in finding ways to get their coal to Asia; the Surrey Fraser Docks/Texada coal port proposal is one of these. Coal would be hauled across the border on the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway, through White Rock and Surrey, transferred to barges at the Fraser Surrey Docks, towed down the Fraser and up the Strait to Texada Island, piled up on Lafarge's Texada dock, and eventually loaded on ships bound for Asia.

In response to Canadian opposition, Jeff Scott, CEO of Fraser Surrey Docks, says Fraser Surrey Docks (FSD) has eliminated the stockpiling of coal on its site, and will respray the coal on the trains before they cross the border into Canada, and will add a 'suppression and binding agent' to the coal on the barges before they leave FSD for Texada Island.

### **Opposition Building**

Nonetheless, opposition to the FSD proposal is growing. A new Surrey group, Communities and Coal, has organized a 10,000 signature petition. Voters Taking Action on Climate Change (VTACC) is lobbying for a federal environmental assessment on the entire scheme. Together with Ecojustice, VTACC have written to the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (recently rebranded as Port Metro Vancouver) outlining flaws in the authority's Environmental Impact Assessment of FSD.

More opposition comes from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, who are opposed to 'the entire coal production cycle'; White Rock Council; the New Westminster Raging Grannies; and the BC Nurses Union, whose opposition is based on coal dust and health concerns. CEO Scott, faced with this opposition, followed the suggestion of Port Metro Vancouver that all the studies to date be submitted to an independent third party for evaluation. The 'third party'

chosen was engineering and construction firm SNC-Lavalin.

### **Fraser Not Deep Enough For Ships**

FSD must load coal into barges because it cannot accommodate fully loaded deepsea ships—the George Massey Tunnel only allows a draft of 11.5 metres. Of course, if the tunnel is replaced with the \$3 billion bridge recently announced by premier Christy Clark, and the river dredged, then the potential for export through Fraser Surrey Docks is considerably enhanced. (FSD is owned by Australia's Macquarie Group.)

### **Meanwhile, Back On Texada...**

Dr Paul Martiquet, the Medical Health Officer for Coast Garibaldi/Bella Bella/Bella Coola, has written to the BC Ministry of Energy and Mines seeking a full Health Impact Assessment of the expanded coal storage and handling area on Texada Island. (Texada presently stores and ships coal barged from the Quinsam mine, north of Campbell River.)

Dr Martiquet indicates the support of Dr Paul Van Buynder (Chief Medical Health Officer, Fraser Health Authority) and Dr Patricia Daly (Chief Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority).

According to the Health Authorities, the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) should include the impacts of airborne dust, the potential contamination of air, land, fresh water and tidal water, diesel exhaust, excessive noise, and the effects of increased marine traffic.

They expressed particular concern about the stormwater management plan, saying that Lafarge 'has a poor track record in addressing concerns of run-off from the limestone quarry'. It was recommended that issues of heavy metal and nitrate pollution be resolved as a condition of expansion of the coal storage area. They conclude that, 'substantive community consultation will be a critical component of the acceptability of the outcome of the HIA'.

Meanwhile, the rural Electoral Area directors of the Powell River Regional District voted on September 26 to support the Lafarge proposal. However, the City of Powell River passed a motion on October 3rd calling for environmental and health impact assessments of the entire FSD/Lafarge proposal for the Strait of Georgia, including Texada and Lasqueti Islands, and Powell River. ☞

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Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 250-216-9961 • [islandtides@islandtides.com](mailto:islandtides@islandtides.com) • [www.islandtides.com](http://www.islandtides.com)