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## **Woodfibre LNG environmental assessment challenged-**

**Patrick Brown**

**T**he citizen group, My Sea to Sky, has challenged the provincial environmental assessment of the proposed Woodfibre LNG plant as inadequate in its risk assessment, failing to consider the passage of LNG tankers past the Gulf Islands and Victoria to the Pacific Ocean, and failing to involve the public.

A letter to federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq from lawyer Bill Andrews asserts that the provincial assessment does not meet the requirements set by the federal government for the substitution of the provincial process for the federal one.

Finally, My Sea to Sky says the site itself fails to meet the requirements set by the LNG industry, in that it is too close to a populated area and the shipping route to the open sea is too long and hazardous.

The LNG plant, to be built on an old pulp mill site towards the east end of Howe Sound, will have three 180,000 cubic metre LNG carriers: two will be permanently moored and used for LNG storage, and a third will be loading for shipment. When fully loaded, each LNG bulk carrier will proceed down Howe Sound past Gambier Island, between Bowen Island and Horseshoe Bay, crossing two regular ferry routes before reaching Passage Island.

### **Industry Location—‘Distant From Population’**

The LNG industry association, the Society of International Gas Tanker and Terminal Operators (SIGTTO) is dedicated to maintaining the industry’s good safety record. This is dependent upon ‘adherence to rigorous standards regarding terminal siting decisions, as well as terminal design and operations’.

SIGTTO’s criteria for a safe LNG operation include ‘a short approach channel’ (not too far from the open ocean); ‘a location suitably distant from centres of population’, ‘traffic separation schemes in longer approach routes’, ‘anchorage should be established at the port entrance and inshore, for the safe segregation of LNG carriers’, ‘positioning an LNG terminal on the outside of a river bend raises the risk that a passing ship may strike the berthed carrier...’

The SIGTTO siting document continues, ‘in some circumstances, such as a large LNG release close to a populated area, it may be impossible to devise a realistic contingency plan

because of the nature of the problem.’

### **LNG Carrier Route To The Ocean Too Long**

From Passage Island, the LNG bulk carrier route then crosses the Strait of Georgia past Roberts Bank (crossing several more ferry routes), through Boundary Pass, down Haro Strait past Turn Point, and enters the Strait of Juan de Fuca at Victoria, and the Pacific Ocean at Buoy Juliet. This route is essentially the same as a wide variety of shipping to the Port of Vancouver, which would include proposed significant increases in tanker traffic from the Westridge Terminal of the Trans Mountain Pipeline, and increasing container ship traffic from the proposed Roberts Bank 2 facility.

Both Westridge and Roberts Bank 2 are currently under environmental review, including their routes to the ocean. The environmental review for Woodfibre’s LNG carriers does not include the route to the Pacific; it ends at Passage Island.

The provincial assessment refers to the TERMPOL process to deal with some of these issues. It appears, however, that the TERMPOL process will not be completed in time to incorporate its findings in the provincial assessment.

### **Risk Assessment Inadequate**

Andrews’ letter refers to US requirements for risk assessment of LNG facilities and shipping routes. Quoting US studies on the behaviour of LNG spills and their associated vapour clouds, natural gas clouds and flammability, he uses US Coast Guard hazard zone definitions to identify the communities at risk from LNG spills at the Woodfibre facility or along the shipping route to the ocean.

Within 2,500 metres, he names Bowen Island, part of West Vancouver including Horseshoe Bay, Lions Bay, Bowyer Island, Anvil Island, the Sea to Sky Highway, and the Gulf Islands along Haro Strait. The provincial assessment has omitted plume modelling from a possible spill, and had failed to adequately address LNG spill risk, the letter says.

### **Substitution Requirements Ignored**

All these considerations, writes Andrews, mean that the provincial assessment will not meet the requirements of its substitution for a separate federal one. In addition, he charges,

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the federal requirement for public participation in the assessment is not being met. He lists documented objections from all the local governments in the Howe Sound area in support of this assertion.

He goes on to suggest that the ultimate assessment of the low risk of an occurrence of high consequence cannot be left to officials working with normal risk assessment tools. Instead, he says, it is essentially a political decision, and must be made by the Minister. ✉