



Photo: Ian Schofield

IRON ORE AND RARE EARTHS:

Conference on Health and Social Acceptability for
Residents of Sept-Îles and the Innu People

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SUMMARY

In response to an initiative by the *Groupe Citoyen de Sept-Îles* (Sept-Îles Citizens' Group), MiningWatch Canada and the Coalition Québec meilleure mine held an information evening on Tuesday, October 23, 2025, at the Shaputuan Museum in the Innu community of Uashat mak Mani-utenam about health and social acceptability issues related to critical minerals, particularly iron ore and rare earth elements.

The purpose of the evening was to provide the public with an independent overview of current and future mining development in the Sept-Îles region. A question-and-answer period allowed the audience to participate and discuss their concerns directly with the panelists.

Journalists on site reported that about 100 people attended, more than a quarter of whom were from the Innu Nation. The two lectures, each lasting one hour, were followed by an additional hour of discussion with the audience.

This event was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Trottier Family Foundation.



Participation

About 100 people participated, more than a quarter of whom were from the Innu Nation. People came from as far away as Baie-Comeau to attend the event.



Organizing Committee

The organizing committee, led by MiningWatch Canada, was made up of Yasmine Fontaine, a master's student and member of the Innu community of Mani-utenam, Louise Gagnon and Denis Bouchard from the *Groupe Citoyens de Sept-Îles*, Marc Fafard from *Sept-Îles sans uranium*, and Miriam Shaftoe and Rodrigue Turgeon from MiningWatch Canada. The Coalition Québec meilleure mine was represented by Marc Fafard and Rodrigue Turgeon, both members of its Coordinating Committee.



Location

The meeting was held at the Shaputuan Museum in the Innu community of Uashat. The organizing committee chose this location because it was important to make the event accessible to members of the Innu Nation, while remaining open to the entire population of Sept-Îles. With a capacity of just over 100 people, the venue was also selected for its ability to accommodate a large number of people in one place and for the high quality of technical services offered.



Partners

We would like to thank our partners who supported the technical and logistical aspects of our event. The Shaputuan Museum for renting the room and microphones; Steve Vollant for sound engineering; Moïse Jourdain from InnuWeb for video recording; Jacques Gélneau for photos; Alfred McKenzie for red seed cakes.

The Organizations

The Coalition Québec meilleure mine (QMM) and MiningWatch Canada (MWC) both aim to promote best practices and strong public policies in the mining sector with a focus on social, environmental, and economic issues.

Founded in 2008, **Coalition Québec meilleure mine** (QMM) now brings together some 40 organizations representing more than 250,000 people from all regions of Quebec. The coalition brings together citizen organizations, environmental organizations, unions, academics, and medical associations. For 17 years, the QMM Coalition has been at the heart of debates affecting the mining sector and has helped raise awareness among public decision-makers and a broad cross-section of Quebec society on important mining issues. The QMM Coalition has made a positive contribution to redefining public policy in the mining sector, particularly the Mining Act, mining royalties, financial guarantees for restoration, environmental oversight, social acceptability, territories incompatible with mining activity, as well as Quebec's positions on uranium and asbestos mining, and more recently on so-called critical and strategic minerals. Since 2008, coalition members have participated in some 20 environmental assessments of mining projects in Quebec, including a dozen by the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) and a dozen before the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC). Since 2014, QMM has been an active member of the Quebec Minister of Mines' Advisory Committee.

Founded in 1999, **MiningWatch Canada** (MWC) now has around 40 member organizations representing, collectively, several hundred thousand individuals across Canada. Over the past 20 years, MWC has become a key player, conducting more than 200 investigations, interventions, reports, and legal actions on as many mining projects nationally and internationally. Environment, human rights, Indigenous rights, transparency, and corporate accountability—these are the issues that drive MWC's interventions at both the community and public policy levels. MWC is a founding member of the advisory committee for the National Initiative for Orphan and Abandoned Mine Sites (INMOA-NOAMI, federal/provincial), as well as the national program for Neutralization of Drainage Water in the Mining Environment (NEDEM-MEND). MWC has also been a member of the Ontario Minister of Mines' advisory committee, the federal reform of environmental assessments, and the national inquiry by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development into the application of the federal Metal and Diamond Mine Effluent Regulations in Canada. MWC has been involved in some 20 legal actions, including four in the Federal Court and the Supreme Court of Canada, related to mining issues in the country.

The Panelists



Rodrigue Turgeon is co-spokesperson for the Coalition Québec meilleure mine and MiningWatch Canada's National Program co-lead. He is a lawyer with a master's degree in law and life sciences and a diploma in common law and transnational law. Previously, he worked for the Commission of Inquiry on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and public services and the Quebec Environmental Law Centre. He is the author of *Nanikana*, published by Éditions de l'Esprit libre, and has contributed to several collective works.

Marie-Ève Maillé, Ph.D., is a lawyer and mediator. Over the past 20 years, she has developed expertise in social impact assessment and social acceptability assessment for major development projects. She is the author of the books *Acceptabilité sociale : sans oui, c'est non* (Social Acceptability: If It's Not Yes, It's No) and *L'affaire Maillé* (The Maillé Case), published by Écosociété. She teaches environmental conflict analysis at the University of Sherbrooke. As a lawyer, she is part of the team responsible for the class action lawsuit against the Horne Smelter and the Quebec government for their failure to protect the population of Rouyn-Noranda from dangerous air contaminants for decades. In her solo practice, she supports citizen groups in their fight against the mining and forestry industries, among others.



The Côte-Nord Public Health Department, at the invitation of the Groupe Citoyen de Sept-Îles, had confirmed its participation in the event. Then, on October 16, 2025, less than a week before the event, a communications advisor from the *Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de la Côte-Nord* (North Shore Integrated Health and Social Services Center - CISSSCN) sent an email to the members of the citizens' committee stating that "given the time constraints related to ongoing files and the limited capacity of its teams, the Public Health Department will not be able to participate in the meeting." In its email, the CISSSCN stated that "the detailed health profile for Sept-Îles [...] will be finalized in the coming weeks" and then "disseminated to the public."

At the time of writing, six weeks after this email was sent, this commitment still appears to be unfulfilled. Explanations for this last-minute reversal were shared at the beginning of the conference, and several people in the room expressed their dissatisfaction with this sudden withdrawal by the regional public health department.

The Event Proceedings

At 6:30 p.m., Terry Kennedy, a member of the Sept-Îles Citizens' Group, asked the approximately 100 people in attendance to take their seats. Without further ado, he gave an introductory speech, thanking everyone for coming and the Shaputuan Museum for hosting the event. His introductory remarks reiterated the purpose of the meeting and introduced the speakers, before explaining the reasons given by the regional public health department—not without criticizing them with a touch of humour—for withdrawing from the panel a few days before the event.

The first presentation, given by Rodrigue Turgeon, lawyer, co-lead of MiningWatch Canada's national program, and co-spokesperson for the Coalition Québec meilleure mine, aimed to paint a picture of the so-called “critical and strategic” mines and mineral projects in the Côte-Nord region. This presentation, posted online immediately after the event, begins with an introduction to our organizations, followed by an acknowledgment that Quebec's mining regime is based on the dispossession of territories and the denial of Indigenous peoples' rights.



Supported by data and sources, the presentation demonstrates how the sharp increase in demand for minerals in the coming years, combined with the decline in mineral reserves, is leading to an explosion in the volume of waste generated by mining activities.

These factors also contribute to the general problem of the overexploitation of natural resources. The point was made that Quebec ranks among the societies with the highest material footprints in the world,, directly contributing to the transgression of several “planetary boundaries.”

Following this discussion, a brief overview of mining in Quebec was provided, with a particular focus on minerals deemed “critical and strategic.” Mr. Turgeon then pulled up the official definition of critical minerals, and pointed out how it is focused on their economic importance, bridging into a discussion of greenwashing and the trend of framing all critical mineral projects as crucial to the energy transition. The current list of critical minerals was then pulled up, highlighting the six main minerals mined and sought after in the Côte-Nord region and the Nitassinan. The economic benefits of the mining sector for Quebec as a whole, and more particularly for the North Shore, were highlighted. Going through mineral by mineral, an emphasis was placed on the role of greed, overconsumption and the military industry in driving demand, given that these realities are largely underplayed by industry and government.

As the title of the conference suggested, particular attention was paid to rare earth elements and iron ore. With regard to rare earths, our analysis of Torngat Metals, the company at the heart of current local debates with its mega-project involving a mine and separation plant, particularly caught the attention of the audience, many of whom had come to learn independently about its extremely worrying impacts and risks. The idea of building such a plant in the Sept-Îles Bay has sparked significant opposition, which we believe is justified for several reasons, including the importation, transportation, processing, and perpetual storage of radionuclides present in the deposit. An important question arised regarding the City of Sept-Îles' capacity to simultaneously accommodate additional workers for such a plant project as well as others for another project of the same or even greater scale.

After discussing issues related to graphite, titanium, and apatite, there was extensive discussion of iron ore, the region's main economic driver and one of the two most important players in the province's mining sector along with gold. In Quebec, in 2022, 48% of total water withdrawals in the mining sector were made by the three companies that mine iron ore alone. It was noted that, overall, 98% of iron ore is used to produce steel and that Canada ranks eighth in global production. The significant contribution of the steel and iron ore sectors to greenhouse gas emissions was highlighted, emphasizing the urgent need to take action to decarbonize this sector

However, the Labrador Trough is also one of the most abundant and concentrated iron ore deposits in the world, hence its designation as a “critical” mineral in Quebec. This consideration, coupled with the strong potential for renewable energy, opens the door, according to some, to the potential for locally transforming iron ore into hot briquetted iron (HBI).

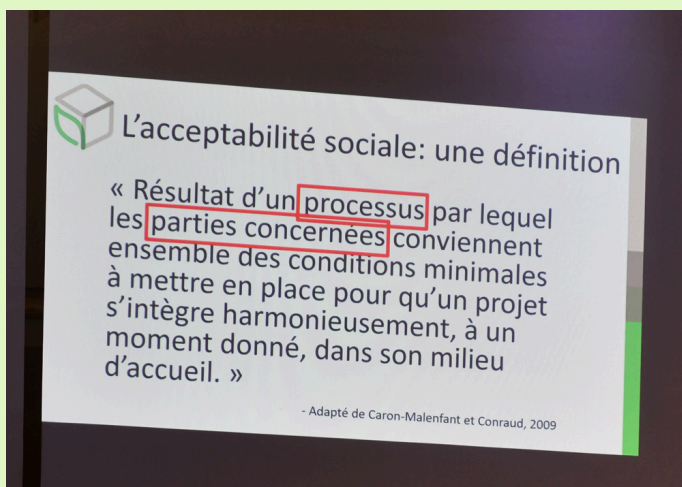


We presented the conclusions of a report published this year by researchers Jonas Algers and Chris Bataille entitled “Strategic Decarbonization of the Canadian Steel Industry: A Worker-Centered Approach to Reducing Emissions, Increasing Value Added, and Strengthening Global Supply Chains.” According to the researchers, the technology needed for this conversion, which already exists and is being used in Sweden, among other places, has the potential to create 14,000 jobs and increase the sector's annual value by \$25 billion. Aware that this idea is not new to the Innu and the people of the North Shore, we opened the discussion on this point to hear their comments or concerns on the subject, and did not encounter any red flags.



The floor was then given to Marie-Ève Maillé, lawyer, professor, mediator, and expert in social acceptability. She began her presentation with a reflection on her visit to the region a decade earlier, at a time when social divisions were sharply apparent in response to the Arnaud apatite mine project. She then focused on detailing the implications of the definition of social acceptability as applied in Quebec,.

By emphasizing that projects that provoke some form of social opposition often demonstrate a lack of social acceptability without the need to prove this by majority vote at all times, her presentation highlighted the civic involvement of the people in the room, put into words the harsh realities they have been experiencing for years, and legitimized many of the concerns expressed by the audience about various mining issues and projects in the region and on the ancestral territory of the Innu people. Ms. Maillé made the point that the burden should fall on developers to demonstrate that their projects are socially acceptable, rather than on the public to prove otherwise.



After Ms. Maillé's presentation, the audience was invited to take a short break to stretch their legs and enjoy red seed cake baked by Alfred McKenzie, who is Innu from the community of Uashat mak Mani-utenam.

The last hour was devoted to the public during a question and answer period where a dozen people, both Innu and residents of Sept-Îles and the surrounding area, took turns at the microphone to share their views on the mining sector. Several voices were raised against the proliferation of mining projects, and calls for action were heard repeatedly. The first person to speak, Denise Jourdain, who is Innu, delivered a passionate plea for the mining regime to finally respect the ancestral rights of Indigenous peoples, whose members, and not their band councils, are the true and ultimate holders of those rights. Specific questions were asked about the application of certain regulations in the mining sector, but overall, the comments were mainly aimed at sharing with the crowd the participants' positions in favour of true justice and the immediate reduction of environmental damage.

The conference ended shortly after 10:00 p.m., lasting more than three and a half hours. After giving interviews to the media on site and gathering our equipment, we left the Shaputuan Museum around 11:00 p.m., a sign that the evening had been a long and rich experience.



Photos: Jacques G lineau

Communications

Social Media

- [Facebook](#) event (114 personnes interested or going) et [Bluesky](#).
- [Media Advisory](#) distributed to regional and national journalists covering mining issues sent on October 20, 2025

Media Coverage

- October 20, 2025, [CKAU](#), [interview on the Uashat mak Mani-utenam radio](#). Minerais de fer et terres rares, conférence: Conférence sur la santé humaine et l'acceptabilité sociale avec Marie-Ève Maillé et Rodrigue Turgeon, avec Michel Vollant.
- October 23, 2025, [Radio-Canada Côte-Nord](#), [radio interview](#). Une rencontre citoyenne sur l'avenir minier de Sept-Îles, avec Catherine Paquette.
- October 24, 2025, [Radio-Canada Côte-Nord](#), [online article and TV report](#). Quelle voix pour les citoyens dans les projets miniers?, un article d'Alban Normandin.
- December 2, 2025, [Le Nord-Côtier](#), [web and print article](#). Métaux Torngat : tous les voyants rouges allumés, selon Québec Meilleure Mine, un article d'Émélie Bernier.



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Thank you

