

Shirley Abercrombie
Acting Manager- Mineral Resources
YTG-Economic Development

(CONFIDENTIAL)

December 15, 2000

Dear Shirley,

I am writing to officially inform you that I will be resigning from my position as Mineral Assessment Geologist on January 19, 2001.

I regret having to make this decision, but it seems to be the only available and acceptable option for me. As you know, I have been striving for five and a half years to gather and present information on mineral values to different land-use planning forums. It has been very frustrating to see mineral interests consistently ignored or sidestepped in planning processes. This accumulated frustration, and lack of any effective response when I have brought concerns forward in the past, has taken a toll on my health and my motivation. I feel I must leave in order to regain a sense of perspective. The content of this letter concerns my work within the mineral assessment unit. It reflects my viewpoint on the work environment, and represents my own perceptions only.

My motivation in this work was to bring my skills and knowledge as a geoscientist to the community development process. My contribution was to participate in that process, bringing clear information to the land-use table, supporting planners in making informed and enlightened decisions. My assumption was that government was responsible for steering a fair and balanced process. My disillusionment stems from observing that our work seems to mainly serve the purpose of providing government with the appearance of diligence.

I feel great conflict when I see the suffering in the community as an outcome of government decisions. The negative impacts on the population could be reduced if balanced decision-making was a government reality, both at the bureaucratic and the political levels. I can no longer invest my energies in a process that I feel is disrespectful of my contributions, does not seem to recognize the basic needs of healthy communities, and contributes to painful and unnecessary polarization within our society.

When the mineral assessment program started at YTG in 1995, my focus was on providing mineral potential information in support of the Yukon Parks System Plan. I was then later asked to also comment on Land Claims selections, therefore supporting the Land Claims negotiation process. The Yukon Government then initiated the YPAS planning process. I represented Economic Development on the original YPAS working group. I participated in the drafting of that policy document and sought to contribute to protected area planning by supporting the need for balanced decision-making, an item that has been prominent in every government's political platform.

Since then, I have been joined by two other very dedicated geologists and together we assist various government initiatives in their land-based decisions. I believe that the mineral assessment unit has been doing very high quality work in the field of mineral potential and has worked assiduously in presenting this information in a clear, scientific and non-partisan manner. For five and a half years, we have endeavored to inform and alert policy makers and planners of the impact of governmental decisions on the mineral industry and its associated investment climate. But I feel that all this work

has been mostly ignored, avoided; and our concerns and professional advice minimized. Somehow, the information on mineral values is not being considered or incorporated in the decision-making process.

This situation has become apparent every time land-based decisions have been made public. In retrospect, many of the uncomfortable situations now facing government could have been avoided or mitigated if consideration had been given to many of the issues that were flagged to our policy analysts, our managers and to staff representing other departments. I believe that our professional contribution has been minimized and neutralized. It is very difficult to pursue the task of providing information on mineral values when this information is never incorporated.

Whether regarding the Land Claims front or in the context of YPAS, mineral assessment work should empower government to make balanced and fair decisions on the allocation of land and the activities permitted on that land. This can only happen if there is a desire for balance of land-based interests. The problem is that we consistently face the lack of commitment within government, and even within our department, to take the steps necessary to ensure fair, reasonable and practical balanced decision-making.

It has been very frustrating for me to witness our department's silence when it is readily apparent that our input is not being incorporated in new government policies; when SMAs are negotiated without any consideration for mineral values; when full withdrawal is the only valid mechanism considered for protection; and when we witness planning processes that do not make any effort to strive for balance (Tombstone and Fishing Branch). In accepting this, we support imbalance and become part of the reason for the increasing rift dividing our community. Our work would be more effective if, as a department, we worked as a team at demonstrating the benefits of incorporating resource values in multi-disciplinary analyses and decisions, and therefore getting our voice heard in the land-use planning debate.

I realize government has to respond to the pressures of many competing interests, and I am certain that I am aware of only a few of the aspects and details surrounding decision-making. However, I believe that government is ultimately responsible for ensuring balance in the decision-making process. ~~Striking a~~ balancing our community's needs for conservation and for development is indeed a monumental task. We should be approaching it with respect and creativity. I understand the constraints of the political process, I could deal with the political outcomes if I felt that the concerns and the work were respected and supported within the bureaucracy. Unfortunately, I have not felt that support.

If government is going to attempt to achieve balance, and therefore meet current political commitments, there needs to be a clear direction, possibly involving new priorities, conveyed to the internal bureaucracy. At a departmental level, this could be achieved by staffing new openings in policy with individuals who are knowledgeable of the industry and aware of the socio-economic context and impacts. Better communication between the policy level and the mineral assessment unit is critical in ensuring that decisions be based on timely and pertinent information. The mineral assessment unit should not be doing policy work. However, the people working in this unit need to have their work recognized and supported – they need to have confidence that their concerns are being heard. Clear direction, knowledgeable staff, support for the process and supportive communication between the units will enhance the department's effectiveness in providing input on economic perspectives.

There are many ways of creatively addressing the joint need for protection and for an open land base for resource activities. It has been my experience that these options have not been explored. Outright withdrawal of mineral rights has been the only option considered so far, a convenient option for some interests but with strong negative impacts on the development community. Some other possible options that would address the causes of concern include: legislating road access, creating specific legislation for Habitat Protection Areas, exploring the possibilities multi-level designations with varying levels of protection, and elaborating flexible seasonal land-use regulations to accommodate specific

calving, lambing or migratory needs. Exploring all these alternative possibilities work towards meeting our complex needs as a society and lessening conflict within the community. Additional background and policy work is required to fully participate in the YPAS review process and to support options when negotiating SMAs. Exploring such options requires effort, creativity, and very importantly, the will to educate our partners in decision-making on the actual consequences of development, not just the perceived ones.

I want to recognise the positive change that I see unfolding in the department. I understand that management is now collaborating more closely with our unit, using our Land Status map and associated information to brief our minister. I welcome this willingness to look at issues and facts, I hope it will evolve into a commitment to support the mineral assessment work, both internally and when dealing with other departments. This is the kind of support the process needs. Further support could be gained by ensuring that the vacancy in the policy department be staffed by someone who is committed to balanced land-use planning and is familiar, as I said earlier, with the realities of the development sector.

Incorporating the results of mineral assessments in land-use plans will be a challenging task. In addition to YPAS, the Yukon Land Use Planning Commissions may provide yet another forum in which the commitment to balance may be tested. I hope the Department gets involved and contributes constructively and effectively to that planning process.

I voice these comments in the hope that they will contribute to promoting constructive change in the way the Department approaches land-use issues. I am concerned about the impact of future government decisions on the people of the Yukon. I believe in the purpose of mineral assessments, as we have a responsibility to the community as a whole to ensure informed decision-making. Many of the land-use decisions involving withdrawals will be extremely difficult to reverse. Our contribution should reflect long-term goals and a broad view of our place on the land. I sincerely think that we have all the tools needed to achieve a wise use of the land base. We have the creativity and the talent. What we need is the will to strive for balance, to fully explore issues, and to develop our own solutions to the challenges that are facing us today.

I remain strongly committed to the process and am interested in supporting the department on contract basis in its future explorations of policy or technical issues involving mineral values in land-use planning. I would also be glad to further discuss any of the concerns listed above with you or any other staff.

I realize this is a long letter, and I appreciate you taking the time to read it. This has been a difficult decision for me, and I appreciate the opportunity to outline the reasons and my feelings motivating my decision. I thank you for your support, Shirley, and acknowledge your own efforts in these difficult times. I wish you success in your own future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Danièle Héon

Cc: Lois Craig, Jesse Duke, Angus Robertson, Grant Abbott, Jo-Anne van Randen, Anna Fonseca