

TERRACE STANDARD

NEWS

Opinion polls heighten call for mine regulations reform

by [Josh Massey - Terrace Standard](#)

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Results of a recent poll commissioned by local conservation group SkeenaWild indicate the majority of British Columbia residents support amending regulations for better mine planning and to make operations safer.

The poll was carried out by internationally experienced Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and asked a number of questions to 805 people around the province related to the mining industry.

Only 39 per cent of the 805 people contacted by polling company Greenberg Quinlan Rosner said that jobs and economic benefits of mining outweighed the risk of a tailings break or risks to people's health, environment and local tourism.

Three quarters of all respondents said reforming B.C.'s mining laws would protect jobs and revenue by securing other industries like tourism and fishing.

Despite where respondents lay on the economics or development spectrum they endorsed six reform measures.

“Establishing a mandatory clean-up fund paid into by the industry before a mining project in watersheds shared by Alaska and British Columbia is granted (90%); Increasing the authority and usage of independent review boards to inspect and regulate mining waste facilities (89%); Increasing Ministry of Environment staff dedicated to mining waste facility inspections; Establishing mining no-go zones in sensitive areas such as key salmon watersheds; Requiring consultation with First Nations, and consent from them.”

“It was a standard poll, 805 British Columbians were randomly surveyed, and it was done earlier this fall. It's margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 per cent, so it is standard polling methodology,” said SkeenaWild director Greg Knox.

“It was conclusive that the vast majority of British Columbians support reforms to mining. There was really strong support for six specific reforms. So what we are hoping is that with the provincial government, it is undertaking a mining code review right now and there's also the potential to look at the mining tenure act and update.”

Knox says that land management programs need to better reflect mining and energy sectors now forestry is being eclipsed by new sectors.

And under the most recent revisions to the act back in the late 90's the tenure process was made digital and allowed people to stake claims quickly online, which Knox says needs to be balanced with a system to protect some areas from staking.

Spots off limits to mining tenure and others proposed would be decided through consultation with local communities and First Nations, he said, and this was supported by those polled.

“Specifically here in the northwest, the majority of people actually felt that protecting the environment and tourism and fishing industry is more important than having mines go through, which just shows the strong connection people have to fish wildlife, and local rivers,” said Knox.

A second poll conducted at the same time by another conservation group, Salmon Beyond Borders in Alaska, had similar findings, with respondents there saying they wanted more involvement in assessing Canadian projects that could affect waters flowing into Alaska.

Knox said the Mount Polley mine tailings pond collapse of 2014 and ongoing public concern was the catalyst for the polls.