

Enbridge pipeline poses huge risks

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Enbridge has a record of more than 65 spills annually... a permanent tanker ban is needed from our federal government in order to put an end to risky tar sands proposals that threaten our fragile coast.



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HOW DOES a major pipeline project, designed to carry dirty oil from Alberta's tar sands to a tanker port on BC's west coast, fit with the needed transition to a green energy economy? With plans to build this 1,170 km pipeline, Enbridge Inc. is asking British Columbians to accept a high-risk, high-carbon project in the face of global warming.

If approved, Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline will be built to carry dirty oil from the tar sands to Kitimat, BC, with more than 200 tankers plying the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest every year on their way to Asian markets. The twin pipelines would cross approximately 1,000 rivers and streams, including BC's salmon-rich Fraser and Skeena watersheds. Once built, they will also open the door to more pipelines and create impetus for other oil and gas development projects in the northwest.

While impacts during construction are inevitable, of greater risk are the oil spills that can and will happen despite reassurances from the company. It is more a question of where, when and how much. Enbridge has a record of more than 65 spills annually. The rich and

diverse wild salmon and steelhead populations are vital to the cultures, ecosystems and local economies of BC. Putting them at risk in order to become a throughput for dirty oil is unacceptable.

Despite political and industry pressure to build these pipelines in order to access new tar sands markets in Asia, opposition is growing across the pipeline route with several First Nations and residents speaking out. The Coastal First Nations have unanimously risen up against the project, declaring a moratorium on oil tanker traffic on the north and central coast. They have stated that they will do whatever it takes to stop Enbridge's high-risk project.

While the proposed pipelines have potential for great impact, they are part of a larger story – a story with two ends. On the eastern side of Enbridge's pipelines are the tar sands. Production in the tar sands alone, related to the Northern Gateway pipeline, would produce an estimated 6.5 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year and result in enough tailings leakage to fill 182 Olympic-size swimming pools. In order to fill the capacity of the proposed pipelines, tar

sands would need to expand by 30 percent.

On the western end of the proposed pipelines, a moratorium against tanker traffic would be lifted to introduce over 200 tankers into the waters of Douglas Channel, past Gil Island where BC Ferries' Queen of the North sank in 2006, and into the pristine Caamano Sound. Accidents happen; it is just a matter of time.

Fortunately, three out of four British Columbians support a ban on tankers in these coastal waters. However, a permanent tanker ban is needed from our federal government in order to put an end to risky tar sands proposals that threaten our fragile coast.

The Northern Gateway Pipeline proposal needs to be viewed in its entirety – from the expansion of the tar sands to the coastal tankers to the continued growth of fossil fuel use in light of the urgent need to address global warming. For most Northwest First Nations and residents, the risks from pipelines and tankers are too great. There is a better way forward.

***** *To support a permanent ban on tankers in our north and central coast, visit www.forestethics.ca*