

Arctic seismic tests opposed by eco group

By CBC News

June 18, 2010

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The Pew Environment Group's Oceans North Canada says 6,500 concerned Canadians have signed a letter opposing the seismic testing plans, which Natural Resources Canada wants to begin this summer.

The letter was delivered Friday, Oceans North said in a release.

The seismic tests, which federal scientists hope to start in August, would be an attempt to map out underwater geographical features and see what hydrocarbon resources exist there.

As part of the project, a research vessel would send sound waves through several Arctic waterways, including Lancaster Sound.

The federal government is also thinking of designating Lancaster Sound - which is home to whales, seabirds and other animals - as a national marine conservation area. Parks Canada is working with the Qikiqtani Inuit Association and the Nunavut government on a feasibility study.

Review uncertain

Last month, the Nunavut Impact Review Board, a regulatory body, recommended that the seismic testing project proceed without a detailed environmental review.

But Nunavut Environment Minister Daniel Shewchuk, in his role as the minister responsible for the Nunavut Research Institute, has not confirmed whether he will give the project a research licence.

Inuit in communities near Lancaster Sound expressed concerns about the seismic tests' impacts on marine wildlife during a series of community consultations that Natural Resources Canada held earlier this month.

"Inuit who live near Lancaster Sound told federal officials they are opposed to the seismic testing because it poses risks to bowhead whales, narwhal and other marine mammals," Oceans North said in a release.

"Seismic blasts can damage the hearing of marine mammals and disrupt their migration patterns," it added.

Some Inuit have also raised fears that seismic tests could uncover oil and gas resources in Lancaster Sound, which could motivate exploration companies to drill there. Federal scientists stressed that the seismic testing will not harm marine animals, nor will it be exploring for oil and gas.

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/north/story/2010/06/18/lancaster-sound-letter.html>