

Canadian Yearly Meeting minutes concerning the tar sands

CYM sessions 2008

59. Tar Sands Concern: Those at the Tar Sands Special Interest Group were in unity to recommend to CYM that a Quaker representative on the Kairos delegation of church leaders would be desirable, with the understanding that the delegation approaches it with an open mind and seeks to hear a wide range of perspectives (which is a core part of the Kairos plan), and that financing (up to \$4,000, depending on location of the representative) can be put in place. They suggest that the question of financing be referred to CFSC and that CYM Nominating Committee be authorized to find an appropriate Friend to serve as soon as practicable, since orientation for the delegation will begin in the fall.

We approve this recommendation.

CYM sessions 2009

57. **CFSC: KAIROS Tar Sands**: Jane Orion Smith, Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) General Secretary, introduced the draft minute on the tar sands by reviewing the history of CFSC's involvement with the issue. She summarized the very great amount of natural resources required to produce oil from the tar sands, and showed us images of the tar sands development. She explained the vast scope of the area which is under lease or under proposal for lease. Jane Orion flagged the main environmental issues, including concerns about loss of water quality, habitat and the release of toxic waste into the environment. We asked for revisions in the minute and it will return later in the agenda.

A letter outlining this minute will be sent to the governments of Canada, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and to government bodies in the United States and Europe.

72. **CFSC: KAIROS Tar Sands**: At CYM 2008, CFSC brought forward the question of appointing a Quaker representative to serve on a KAIROS delegation to the Athabasca tar sands being coordinated as a part of KAIROS' work on energy and sustainability. CYM agreed to participate and Dana Bush, a reclamation biologist from Calgary MM, was appointed by Representative Meeting in November 2008 as our representative. The delegation visited the region in May 2009, their focus being to meet with a wide range of groups that are involved in, impacted by, or concerned about tar sands development. Their goal was to listen and learn. They met with indigenous communities, settled communities in the tar sands area, local and provincial government representatives, industry, environmentalists, unions, and faith communities.

Our delegate, Dana Bush, has prepared a report with a range of thoughts for CYM to consider. We receive it with gratitude and also convey our thanks to KAIROS for enabling this opportunity and undertaking this work with its member churches. At CYM 2009, CFSC convened a special interest group where Friends heard a presentation by KAIROS staff member Ed Bianchi who described the first hand

witness of the tar sands devastation. Dana's in-depth report on her observations and recommendations is available from CFSC and is on their website (see News and Events).

A central recommendation in Dana's report is considering a moratorium on new land leases. While Friends still need to consider a clear position on tar sands development, it is clear that the degradation of the land, water, social structures and well-being of all life in the region requires, at minimum, a pause. Tar sands underlie 140,000 square kilometers of boreal forest, and 78,000 square kilometers are already developed or leased with insufficient environmental assessment. To paraphrase Dana's report, the pace of tar sands development has exceeded our ability to address technical issues, infrastructure needs, health impacts, and stabilized employment.

We are deeply concerned about the impacts of tar sands development, present and future. As a first step, we support CFSC and Dana Bush preparing a letter for signature by the Clerks of CYM and CFSC to the Governments of Canada, Alberta, and Saskatchewan expressing the need for a suspension of new leases on land for tar sands development. We are recommending this moratorium given the known impacts and potential impacts of tar sands development. There is a need for much deeper consideration of the immediate and long term consequences of this activity. Are there not less damaging ways to meet our energy needs (including reducing them)?

We also call on these governments to appoint an independent body to conduct a comprehensive study of the impact of the tar sands on the health of those who live nearby and work in the region.

We ask that additional letters expressing our concern be written by CFSC to the governments of countries that access, or hope to access, fossil fuel developed from the tar sands, such as the United States, as well as countries that might exert influence on the governments in Canada on this issue, particularly those with a concern for the rights of indigenous peoples.

We also ask CFSC:

1. to work with QEAN in helping take back Dana's report to Monthly Meetings for consideration and response so that we are better able to articulate Friends' views on this issue as this concern moves forward within KAIROS and potentially among Friends;
2. to also consider how tar sands development factors into the conceptualization of "peaceful energy" as work on that concern continues, and;
3. to explore, perhaps in association with KAIROS, the resource trade implications imposed by NAFTA in relation to the tar sands.

We ask CFSC to bring forward a report based on their consultation with Monthly Meetings to CYM in 2010.

We thank Ed Bianchi of KAIROS, who was a participant on the delegation, for coming to CYM to engage with Friends in a Special Interest Group about the tar sands.

CYM sessions 2010

78. **Tar Sands Working Group:** Jane Orion Smith, General Secretary of Canadian Friends Service Committee, gave background on how a concern around the tar sands arose and became active within our Yearly Meeting. We received the report of this group, which is a part of CFSC. The report is attached as Appendix G. No Meeting has come forward to take up this concern, and it is the practice of CFSC to work on concerns rooted in Monthly Meetings. The Tar Sands Working Group thus recommends that for the time being CYM and CFSC engage in concerns related to the oil sands primarily through our involvement with KAIROS, from which the concern originally came to our Yearly Meeting. This work would be greatly enhanced by the involvement of any Friends who feel a call to be so engaged.

Appendix G. Report from the Tar Sands Working Group to Canadian Yearly Meeting in Session, 2010

Oil sands development is clearly a concern for Canadian Friends. Responses from Meetings to CFSC's request for discernment highlight the environmental devastation and the effects on First Nations communities as priorities to be addressed with some urgency. While most Friends hope to see an eventual, and hopefully rapid, halt to all oil sands production, Friends also urge a non-polarizing way forward that seeks not to lay blame, but to work towards a common cause against that which harms us all. Meetings in Alberta particularly stress the need to honour how deeply intertwined the economics of oil sands development is with people's livelihoods in the region. This does not preclude taking a strong stance on the issue, but points to the need for a loving and creative response to the deep environmental and human threat posed by the frenzied, unchecked mining of these lands.

Friends recognize our own complicity in the fossil fuel economy and generally see oil sands development as a piece of this larger problem. One Meeting wrote; "the development of the tar sands represents a massive effort to extend the status quo, a fossil fuel standard of living, when we need to be moving out of this pattern as quickly as possible... development of the tar sands is a major move in the wrong direction." In her report following the May 2009 KAIROS delegation to the Alberta oil sands, Dana Bush urged Quakers to engage in a creative process to envision positive, life affirming alternatives to our current life style. This desire is echoed in several Meetings' responses. Many Friends are seeking hopeful ways to address a problem, the magnitude of which can easily lead to despair.

Despite this overall concern, responses from Meetings were few. Eight of twenty-four Monthly Meetings responded and one of thirty-one Worship Groups and Allowed Meetings. No Meeting seemed ready to engage extensively with tar sands specific work, though several are deeply involved in related issues. **Given this evaluation, the Tar Sands Working Group recommends that presently CYM**

and CFSC engage in oil sands related concerns primarily through our involvement with KAIROS. KAIROS is planning a major campaign for next year focusing on Indigenous peoples and oil. CFSC has valuable experience working with Indigenous Peoples that will contribute positively to this work. Moreover, CFSC's interns this summer, Rachel Singleton-Polster and Ben Segel-Brown have produced excellent briefing papers that will inform discussion both within Quaker communities and within KAIROS

Ben's report on oil sands land leases suggests that a moratorium on new land leases, as CYM called for in August 2009, may not have a significant impact on development as most areas accessible with current technologies have already been leased. Instead he suggests other approaches such as stricter surface permit legislation and government incentives for more responsible development, and enforcement of industry best-practices may have greater impact.

Rachel's report on the health impact of oil sands development chronicles the confusing history of the health studies that have been done in communities close to the oil sands and concludes that "Canadian Yearly Meeting's call for an "independent body to conduct a comprehensive study of the impact of the tar sands on the health of those who live and work in the region" is timely and urgent action needs to be taken for this call to be meaningful." These reports will be shared with the KAIROS team working on the Indigenous peoples and oil campaign. As way opens, we can further contribute our knowledge and experience - for example, at least two Friends in CYM work as reclamation biologists. It would be valuable to have a briefing paper that looked at the viability of reclamation of oil sands affected land. Is it a matter of there being the will to fund it properly, or is the land too damaged for this to be effective? Should government regulate reclamation more stringently to ensure that this work is completed in a timely way?

In the responses from Meetings, Friends also called for CFSC to engage with other organizations involved in Tar Sands work. The working group strongly supports this suggestion as the details of tar sands development are highly technical and changing quickly. KAIROS has established relationships with many organizations involved in this work including the Pembina Institute; and Friends' relationships to these organizations can be strengthened through our KAIROS membership. **Locating our Tar Sands work within the KAIROS file does not preclude Friends from taking up this concern more actively in their own Meetings and CFSC is well positioned to assist Friends in these leadings as they arise. By participating in the KAIROS work on this issue, Friends will be able to contribute meaningfully to the discussion in areas where we have particular strength, but we will not be attempting to forge ahead on our own. To the working group, this seems the best way forward.**

In Friendship,

Sarah Dick, clerk, Tar Sands Working Group of CFSC

Members of the CFSC Tar Sands Working Group: Sarah Dick (clerk), David Millar, Nat Egan-Pimblett. CFSC staff support: Jane Orion Smith

August 9, 2010