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Government of the Northwest Territories Dismantles Diamond Mining Independent Oversight

(Yellowknife) The Minister of Environment and Climate Change for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has quietly agreed to shut down the environmental oversight bodies for the Snap Lake and Diavik diamond mines, as requested by the diamond mining companies, in decisions released on [June 30, 2026](#) and [July 31, 2026](#). There was no public engagement undertaken as part of these decisions. The funding for the independent oversight body for the Ekati diamond mine is also uncertain as that mining operation is expected to wind down due to financial difficulties as it is in receivership.

The legally-binding environmental agreements covering the diamond mines were part of the “social licence” allowing the diamond mines to go into production, along with Indigenous benefit agreements, socio-economic agreements and other regulatory approvals. Environmental Agreements were negotiated for the Ekati mine in [1997](#), Diavik in [2000](#), and Snap Lake in [2004](#). Other Environmental Agreements provide for independent oversight at the [Giant Mine](#) and the [Gachok’ue](#) diamond mine.

“We disagree with the Minister’s decision and question how the public interest has been served. Independent oversight of large projects has been a hallmark of NWT environmental management for over 20 years. This builds public confidence that our environment is protected and someone is watching government and the co-management system itself. These arrangements complement the co-management system. We have every confidence in co-management, but it rarely gets the funding it requires, people don’t have resources to fully be involved in it, and governments don’t always participate in it,” said Kevin O’Reilly, a spokesperson for Alternatives North. “It’s rather ironic that GNWT gets rid of independent oversight for itself at the request of mining companies, just when the largest diamond mine has become a public liability.”

There are inconsistencies in the Ministerial decisions to shut down independent oversight of the two diamond mines. The Snap Lake decision allows for oversight to continue into 2030 on a mine that is well advanced into closure as production stopped in 2015. The Diavik decision will see independent oversight shut down in 2027 less than a year after production stopped and before significant closure impacts may be observed or detected, and before closure monitoring has been completed. Diavik will also be put in charge of designing and reviewing a fund for independent technical reviews by Indigenous governments of its closure operations for three years, that may or may not be continued, rather than GNWT taking on this responsibility.

“GNWT did not allow for any public engagement in the decision on shutting down independent oversight at these diamond mines, contrary to its own [Open Government Policy](#). Following devolution, GNWT has not proven itself as a responsible resource manager with repeated receiverships, public liabilities and contaminated sites. If Cabinet had adopted the recommendations from the [Standing Committee on preventing and managing contaminated sites](#) in 2023 we might not be here. It’s time for the Auditor General of Canada to be called in to do a performance audit. We need to do much better,” said Kevin O’Reilly.

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