
Responsible Tailings Management Alliance

In April 2022, AWA participated in a kickoff meeting for the newly-formed Responsible Tailings Management Alliance (RTMA). The RTMA is a coalition of concerned parties from across the environmental sector – including both individuals and organizations – focusing on the issue of oil sands tailings and the imminent proposal for the release of tailings effluent into the Athabasca River. The introductory session was the first meeting for those interested in ongoing group participation, although a smaller steering committee has been meeting regularly over the past ten months to get this initiative off the ground. AWA was invited to participate in the inaugural meeting of the RTMA.

As of 2020, tailings ponds in Alberta's oil sands region contain more than one trillion litres of effluent containing toxic substances such as naphthenic acids and high concentrations of salts. The Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada are working together to develop new regulations which would allow for the release of treated tailings effluent back into the Athabasca River. The effluent must meet specific limits for harmful substances. Based on our understanding, the process is being directed by a team

at Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), and they are intending to have a discussion paper released for public comment before the end of 2022, with regulations implemented under the *Fisheries Act* by 2024. AWA is opposed to the proposal to allow for the release of treated tailings into receiving watercourses.

The RTMA is intended to serve as an information sharing hub, where participating organizations can collaborate to strategize and mobilize in a cohesive manner on this important issue. The founding members of the RTMA hope that this coalition will expand to include other passionate and interested groups who share similar goals as it relates to the issue of tailings and those who are willing to work together to prevent the release of these substances back into our natural waterways. The RTMA seeks to ensure that tailings and tailings reclamation are managed in a more responsible manner that meets specific criteria such as (but not limited to) industry covering the costs of reclamation and remediation, respecting the rights of downstream Indigenous communities, incorporating Indigenous traditional knowledge into tailings management, and limiting the creation of new tailings ponds until a scientifically proven approach for reclamation has been determined.

AWA has expressed our interest in ongoing participation as a member of the RTMA, as we do not support the plan by both the federal and provincial governments to allow for the release of effluent back into our already stressed aquatic ecosystems. We look forward to future engagements with the other members of the RTMA and hope we can make a meaningful difference when the proposed tailings regulations are released for comment towards the end of this year.

- By Phillip Meintzer