

Mackenzie pipeline decision coming soon: official

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A decision on whether to build the Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline could come later this year, at least one proponent said at a trade show in Inuvik, N.W.T., this week.

Delegates to the Inuvik Petroleum Show heard from the Aboriginal Pipeline Group and other companies behind the \$16.2-billion Arctic natural gas project, which won [approval from the National Energy Board](#) in December.

The federal regulatory agency has given proponents until the end of 2013 to decide if they want to build the pipeline.

But during a panel discussion at the northern trade show, Aboriginal Pipeline Group president Bob Reid said an announcement could come sooner.

"I hope that over the summer months, we'll be able to carry through and finalize our negotiations with the federal government," Reid said, referring to the proponents' bid to secure loan guarantees or other investments from Ottawa.

"We hope to have an announcement sometime during the summer to make this project a reality," Reid added.

Conditions attached

The Aboriginal Pipeline Group is part of a corporate consortium, led by Calgary-based Imperial Oil, that is spearheading the Mackenzie project. Other partners include Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips and Royal Dutch Shell.

If built, the 1,200-kilometre Mackenzie Valley pipeline would transport natural gas from the Beaufort Sea through the N.W.T.'s Mackenzie River Valley to a hub in northwestern Alberta, where it would connect with southern markets.

The NEB's approval for the project comes with 264 strict conditions to ensure environmental protection and pipeline safety.

"We have reviewed these conditions and feel that we can meet all of them," Heather Marreck, a pipeline representative from Exxon Mobil, told delegates.

'Take advantage of this time'

As the two-day Inuvik Petroleum Show wrapped up on Thursday, former prime minister Joe Clark said various factors — including political ones — seem to be lining up in the pipeline's favour.

"I think what you have to do is take advantage of this time," Clark told said in the event's closing keynote speech.

"You have an NEB report, you have a remarkable consensus here. You have a majority government in Ottawa that is certainly not hostile to the idea of the pipeline."

The election of a majority Conservative government in May has some trade show delegates hopeful that the pipeline will be built.

"Given now that we do have a majority government that has a solid four-year mandate, that hopefully the new minister responsible, Minister [John] Duncan ... [will] continue to work on the file," Inuvik Mayor Denny Rodgers told CBC News.

Rodgers added that Duncan "has always been interested in the North and [has been] very responsive to us."

Government officials are expected to meet with pipeline proponents in September. If the project goes ahead, construction would take four winters.

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