

Anna Flegler: The Precautionary Principle and Risk-Management in Environmental Decision-Making: A case study of the proposed Pebble Mine in Bristol Bay, Alaska

(supervisor's assesment by Miloš Calda)

Brief description

Anna Flegler focuses on the Pebble Mine open-pit project that should enable extraction of very rich deposits of molybdenum, copper, gold, and some other minerals in the pristine natural environment of southern Alaska.

In Chapter 2, Anne Flegler offers a brief history of Alaska, focussing on Russian colonization, the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867 (perhaps the best bargain in history), the admission of Alaska as the 49th state in 1959 to the Exxon-Valdez disaster, the worst oil spill ever (1989).

Alaska, fabulously rich in mineral resources, has attracted many individuals and companies wishing to capitalize on these, starting with the Gold Rush 1898. Needless to say, extraction efforts clash with the lifestyle of rural communities, many of them still living at subsistence level. Alaska happens to be the U.S. state that shows the highest dependence on natural resources. The Bristol Bay area is tiny as compared to the huge territory of the state but it is one of important sources of sustainable salmon fishing industry. The consortium planning to open the Pebble Mine, the Pebble Mine Partnership, is fully owned by Anglo American PLC (this company is active in quarrying and mining in the Czech Republic, too) and by Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd.

The plans to develop minerals' extraction in Bristol Bay have become targeted by both native village groups and various environmentalist organizations like the Sierra Club or Earthworks. In fact, Earthworks began a "no dirty gold" campaign convincing the Tiffany Co. jewellers to denounce Pebble Mine and pledging to refrain from buying Pebble-Mine-extracted gold.

Anne Flegler continues to analyze the permit process. It should be noted here that the huge multinational companies can afford first-class lawyers much more easily than poor Alaskan village communities, communities that are threatened by the Pebble Mine project. Various strategies to prevent the extraction permits are also described in the thesis submitted.

In Chapter 5 Anne discusses various environmental impacts of open-pit mining, especially those affecting the quality of water.

In Chapter 6 there is an excellent treatment of risk-management and the precautionary principle, the latter placing the burden of proof on those who propose an activity that can harm the environment.

Anne Flegler's thesis does not contain any chapter or subchapter discussing literature and sources. The inclusion of such a chapter is a requirement at the Institute of International Studies but it need not be seen as a serious omission for IEPS theses. It is up to the IEPS examination commission to decide whether this represents a flaw importnt enough to affect Ms. Flegler's grade.

The thesis can be described as descriptive-analytical. It does not rely on the usual thesis/hypothesis and its verification/refutation format, a pity I should say.

Ann Flegler has submitted a thesis that is based on good research, good resources. She took into consideration both sides of the struggle for/against Pebble Mine, considered pros and cons. Her writing is fluent and mostly very carefully formulated. I suggest to grade her thesis „very good to excellent“ (1 or 2 in the Czech grading system), depending on the defense discussion and on the commission’s view of the above/mentioned lack of a special section devoted to the examination of sources.

For the defense discussion, I suggest the subject of precautionary principle and risk-management.

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Doc. PhDr. Miloš Calda, January 27th, 2010.