

Press Release

Mining Project Threatens One of Europe's Most Important Water Reservoirs: Lake Vättern in Sweden

The Swedish authorities are called upon to take action as World Water Week opens in Stockholm

Monday 27 August 2018, Geneva, Switzerland — Green Cross Sweden, with the support of Green Cross International, and along with Urbergsgruppen Grenna-Norra Kärr, denounces the current and proposed mining activities of Tasman Metals AB as endangering public health and the ecosystems around Lake Vättern, one of Europe's most important sources of drinking water. The Norra Kärr mining project is too great a threat to allow its continuation, and all related activities in the area must cease, including the collection of ore samples for prospecting purposes through test drilling. According to existing Swedish and EU environmental codes it should be impossible for such a mining lease to be granted.

Should this mining project nevertheless be authorised, we demand that civil society plays an active role in the review and approval of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) being prepared by Tasman Metals AB, prior to its submission to the Swedish mining authorities. This EIA study must also include the damages already caused by prospecting activities, and fully disclose their plans for eliminating health risks and reducing the environmental cost of their operations. Should the process go ahead, we strongly recommend that a site-specific environmental risk assessment is done, where the local concerns of the mine and the releases of chemicals are addressed.

Since 2009, Tasman Metals AB (a Swedish subsidiary of Leading Edge Materials Ltd, a Canadian mining group) has sought to acquire an exploitation concession from the Mining Inspectorate of Sweden to extract rare earth elements (REE) as close as 1.5 kilometres from Lake Vättern.

Despite losing their exploitation concession in 2016, and following a successful appeal by local stakeholders, Tasman Metals AB has restarted the application process, which includes current prospecting activities. While prospecting can cause damage to the environment, the company has already been test drilling throughout the region as a part of these operations.

Future mining will impact the integrity of Lake Vättern, as toxic and radioactive substances can seep into the groundwater, polluting the water resources. Lake Vättern provides drinking water for approx. 250,000 people, in 11 municipalities, and with an additional 8 municipalities on the way, making an estimated total of 500,000 people in the near future.

The presence of some 5,500 tonnes of ammunition at the bottom of the lake, due to military activity, constitutes another potential risk for public health and the lake's ecosystem. This issue was highlighted at Green Cross Sweden's Protect Lake Vättern event in March 2018 by Hans Sanderson, Senior Scientist and advisor for Dept. of Environmental Science, Aarhus University and advisor for the Danish Center for Energy and the Environment (DCE), in collaboration with Green Cross International, the local environmental group Urbergsgruppen Grenna-Norra Kärr, and parliamentary leaders.

According to Gunilla Högberg Björck, the environmental lawyer with GBH Environmental Law, representing the NGOs and local citizens in the aforementioned successful appeal to the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court in 2016 against Tasman Metals AB: "If they are fully enforced, the Swedish and EU environmental codes should not allow the granting of the necessary permits to start any mining project, regardless of how thorough the EIA is. If it is nevertheless granted, an exploitation

concession would allow Tasman to drill, blast, and deplete the natural resources of the region for at least the next 25 years.”

The company currently has until September 28, 2018 to submit a new, more thorough and extensive EIA, which now has to cover a whole 10 square kilometres around the mine, rather than just the proposed open pit mining area.

In a time when our planet and all its ecosystems are facing the consequences of climate change – such as the droughts and wildfires that have been occurring across Sweden – it is imperative that we preserve our precious watersheds for future generations. Lake Vättern is a notably deep cold water lake, filled with crystal clear water – something that will prove to be of even greater importance in the future, as shallower lakes become warmer and allow microorganisms, bacteria and algae to grow and flourish to worsening levels and threatening the fish population. Deep water intakes allow the provision of high quality drinking water. For these reasons, the importance of protecting and preserving Lake Vättern cannot be overstated.

Marie-Laure Vercambre, Green Cross International’s Water for Life and Peace Programme Director, paints a broader picture: “The adoption by the international community of a Sustainable Development Goal for Water, and of several UN resolutions recognising the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, reflects the urgency of the matter. What measures will States take to meet these goals and honour their populations’ human rights? How compatible is this industrial development with those environmental and public health goals?”

This sentiment is mirrored by Carina Gustafsson, Chair of Urberggruppen Grenna-Norra Kärr: “We must strengthen the protection of our drinking water, as groundwater levels are at an all time low and Sweden and the world are burning. A secure supply of drinking water is an issue of survival and has to rank in highest priority. This is why we urge the Swedish authorities to prohibit the implementation of environmentally hazardous industrial projects, such as Tasman Metal’s Norra Kärr mining project, which is so close bordering Lake Vättern, in order to protect and secure all vital drinking water sources.”

Green Cross International was founded in 1993 by Mikhail Gorbachev, who was inspired by the Rio Earth Summit in ‘92 to create a body that responds holistically to the combined challenges of security, poverty and environmental degradation to ensure a sustainable and secure future. The organization currently operates in over 30 countries, providing solutions through dialogue, mediation and co-operation.

Green Cross Sweden is a national affiliate of Green Cross International founded in 1994 by the late environmental journalist Jan Danielson and former Member of the European Parliament Maj Britt Theorin. Today with Chairman Ebbot Lundberg and Vice Chairman Major John Olov Fridh the organisation works in Sweden and internationally towards reconciling security and environmental issues towards a more sustainable world.

Urberggruppen Grenna-Norra Kärr is a local affiliate of Urberggruppen, a Swedish association that works towards long-term conservation of the Earth’s natural resources, and against the extraction of finite raw materials from the Earth’s crust.

World Water Week is the annual focal point held in Stockholm for the globe's water issues organized by **SIWI**, the Stockholm International Water Institute. In 2018, World Water Week will address the theme "Water, ecosystems and human development". Last year over 3,300 individuals and around 380 convening organizations from 135 countries participated.

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