

London, UK  
Monday, April 14, 2008

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## Spawning protest

*Anglo American's proposed Alaskan mine is a threat to the world's greatest wild salmon fishery and the communities and businesses that depend on it*

Bobby Andrew

As [Anglo American](#), the world's second-largest mining company, greets its shareholders at its annual general meeting this week in London, I wish to send a clear message from the far reaches of Anglo American's holdings - [Bristol Bay](#), in southwest Alaska.

The proposed [Pebble mine](#), one of Anglo American's newest projects, is a direct threat to the world's greatest wild salmon fishery and the communities and businesses that depend on it. It is important for shareholders to know that businesses and groups from Alaska, the UK and beyond who support responsible mining do not believe this mine will ever get permitted.

The proposed Pebble mine is a massive open pit gold-copper mine - the largest in North America - that would sit in the heart of the rich, salmon-spawning headwaters of Bristol Bay, between three national parks and wildlife refuges. It would cover 72 square kilometres, dewater free-flowing wild salmon streams and use an earthen dam twice the height of the Big Ben tower to hold back over 7 billion tons of harmful mine waste.

I represent Nunamta Aulukestai, an association of Alaskan Native corporations from the Bristol Bay area. Our region is home to an annual cycle of millions upon millions of fish surging upriver to spawn. Along their journey, they feed a world of consumers hungry for healthy wild salmon, our families and countless grizzly bears. Globally, wild salmon fisheries are in drastic decline. Yet the Bristol Bay watershed, with its intact rivers and undeveloped landscape, still supports a thriving, world-class wild fishery. Bristol Bay produces one-third of the world's sockeye salmon, sustains thousands of jobs and is worth about \$400m annually. The clean water and salmon are the reason why we call our rivers and streams "the waters of life".

My village is downstream of Anglo American's proposed Pebble mine. Nearly 2,000 pages of Pebble mine plans and permit applications map out the massive scale of Anglo American's project. The vast footprint of this mine, along with the proposed road, power plant and slurry lines, are a direct and inevitable threat to the salmon.

I am worried that this mine will pollute our rivers with sulfuric acid and heavy metals. I am worried that the drainage from the mine and billions of tons of mining waste upstream will ensure that my generation will be the last to grow up knowing the salmon will always return to feed our people. I am worried that the clean Alaskan water and fisheries that the world takes for granted will become yet another memory from our past. Without our fisheries, I fear a bleak and impoverished future for Alaskan Natives living here.

Anglo American shareholders should know, too, that strange political bedfellows are joining strong local opposition to the Pebble mine, making it far from a sure thing.

Just about every commercial fishing organisation in Alaska opposes Pebble, as do many seafood processors. Ardent conservatives and anti-environmentalists, including Alaska's senior US senator Ted Stevens and David Keene of the American Conservative Union, think this mine is a bad idea. Sportsmen's organisations as varied as the Dallas Safari Club and Trout Unlimited don't want the mine built either. Even the retailers that outfit them, including UK-based high-end fly fishing rod and reel maker Hardy, are opposed to the mine.

Right now, commercial fishermen and Alaskan Native leaders are joining Republican sportsmen in backing a ballot initiative to prevent the Pebble mine from operating. Recently, prominent jewellery retailers, such as Tiffany & Co. and Fortunoff, pledged opposition to the mine in recognition of the area's international ecological value.

Sustained high prices for gold and other metals are fuelling mining across the world. While Anglo American can choose to go elsewhere for business, there's no replacement value or supplemental industry for Alaska's wild salmon fisheries.

My people have lived on these Alaskan lands since time immemorial. Now, when stock markets are volatile and the US dollar is sliding, Bristol Bay fisheries offer economic and social stability. If Bristol Bay has clear running streams and healthy wild salmon, the world can reap the commercial and recreational value of the fishery, while we will have food for our families and the strength of our cultural traditions to hand down to our children and grandchildren.

The proposed Pebble mine has the potential to do real harm to Anglo American's reputation - you can't force a community to accept a mine it does not want. Although Alaska is pro-development, we draw the line at projects that threaten our wild salmon.

Anglo American shareholders should understand, as they go into their annual general meeting, that we will stand firm in our opposition to the Pebble mine.