



From Sunset to Sunrise Industry

Address to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade by Pierre Gratton, President and CEO

Tuesday, October 06, 2026
11:30 AM

Good morning.

Before we begin, I want to take a moment to recognize that we are gathered today on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. I want to acknowledge the hundreds of Indigenous nations across Canada on whose traditional lands support our industry and with whom we continue to build strong, respectful partnerships.

Thank you to the Vancouver Board of Trade for this invitation to deliver my final address as CEO of The Mining Association of Canada. As many know, I will be retiring at the end of this year after 15 and a half years as a CEO and more than a quarter century representing Canada's mining industry in different capacities, including as CEO of MABC.

It was as CEO of MABC that I gave my first address to the Board of Trade in 2008 and this has been an annual event ever since, interrupted just once, I think, during the pandemic. That first speech is forever etched in my brain, probably because I was the most nervous I'd been, but also because it was honestly one of my favourites. Titled "Big Brains and Why Mining Needs Them", I spoke about the inherent complexity of the mining sector and how, to be successful, it must draw on an incredible diversity of talent — from

engineers and geologists to political scientists, anthropologists and even theologians.

I got the idea for this speech from the legendary Jim Cooney, here with us today, to whom we owe not only the idea for my speech but the term “social license”, which he coined in an interview describing the emerging reality in the 1990s that it had no longer become enough to secure regulatory approvals to succeed in mining. A social license was also needed, which describes the ongoing acceptance of a project by local communities, stakeholders and the general public. I know few individuals who can lay claim to having introduced a term that has then achieved universal recognition. A member of the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame, Jim was well ahead of his time and contributed so much to how today’s modern mining sector thinks and operates.

My speech in 2008 reflected the new reality of mining, how it had become, much to the frustration of some, a much more difficult

business to be in. It's hard enough that mining is extremely capital intensive, that metal markets are cyclical, that geology and metallurgy is complex, that one in ten thousand discoveries becomes a mine, that regulatory processes are slow and at times unpredictable; having to worry about social license added a whole other layer of uncertainty. And it added a whole other bunch of skill sets necessary for success. The mining industry, ever pragmatic and adaptable, set out to hire and acquire those skills and transform the industry into how it is today.

As it's my last speech to this important business institution, I thought it made sense to reflect on the past 25+ years I've been working as an advocate for the Canadian mining industry. Because a lot has changed, including the talent we use to succeed.

A Sunset Industry

When I first joined MAC in 1999, the policy narrative around mining wasn't great. Yes, standing at about 4 percent of GDP, we were

important to the economy. We paid the highest wages in the country. We were, in some communities, the most important employer. We contributed a lot to Canada's balance of trade. All of these things are still largely true today, but in the 1990s mining had become a sector not embraced but tolerated.

We, along with some other resource sectors, were described as “sunset industries,” not the future but the past and something we needed to be weaned off of. Other sectors — high tech and services — were sexier, promoted and supported by governments. Part of this was because mining was becoming a source of friction. Friction with workers over safety rules. Friction with the environmental movement. Friction with Indigenous communities. And when you're a source of friction, the political class tends to take a step back.

Mining jobs were seen as low tech and dirty, our workforce rural and uneducated. The sector was seen as dangerous and we caused a lot of environmental damage. As environmental awareness grew, the

lion's share of MAC's policy work shifted to environmental matters, whether it be effluent regulations, environmental assessment, tailings regulations, air quality regulations, the list went on.

Meanwhile, on the fiscal side, MAC's work focused on resisting tax reforms that sought to do away with favourable tax regimes conducive to mining investment as opposed to advancing them.

Mining Watch Canada was formed, an NGO whose entire focus was on our sector — our own dedicated critic. What an honour!

Headquartered in Ottawa, they started to show up everywhere we went, seen as an important voice to offset our own and invited into every policy process.

And last, but by no means least, Indigenous communities were asserting their rights, transforming the legal basis upon which natural resources development was based. All sectors were having to adapt and, to Jim Cooney's point, learn to engage and earn the trust, confidence and support of local communities.

A Political Environment with Consequences

All of these factors have consequences and there were many.

In the mid-2000s, Canada was a top five producer of uranium, nickel, potash, cobalt, platinum group metals, cadmium, magnesium, gypsum and others. In our reports — and the government's — we measured in terms of “top five.”

We still had value-added smelters and refineries in places like Flin Flon, Thompson, the Gaspé and Bathurst. Some of the biggest mining and metals companies in the world were headquartered in Canada. It was a sector Canada could be proud of, and those of us who worked in it certainly were. But others, not so much.

At that time, rising capital, labour and regulatory costs contributed to an expansion of Canadian exploration and investment abroad. It was cheaper to go elsewhere, and easier, and so off we went, to places like Peru, Chile, Brazil, Mexico and West Africa. We still managed to attract the lion's share of global exploration spending to

Canada, and enjoyed a diamond “rush” after the discovery of Ekati, which ultimately placed Canada in third spot in the production of diamonds by value. And searching for diamonds helped us discover Voisey’s Bay, which still stands as the last major base metal development of the past three decades. But the 2000s was the beginning of a gradual decline, brought about in part by policy neglect.

Over the past two decades we’ve gone from the second largest producer of nickel to sixth. We started to measure Canadian production not as “top five” but “top ten” to help boost the narrative. Just in the past 10 years, copper production has declined by 23%, nickel by 44 % and iron ore by 6%. The challenge is also evident in Canada’s reserve base, where proven and probably reserves of most base metals have declined over the long term, with zinc reserves down 94% from their 1997 high.¹

¹ Mining Association of Canada, *Facts & Figures 2026*.

The story is similar with mineral processing. We've closed smelters in Flin Flon, Thompson, the Gaspé, Bathurst and Timmins. Between 2016 and 2024, Canada has experienced a net loss of seven non-ferrous metal smelting and refining facilities. Refined production of cobalt, copper, nickel and zinc have declined by 23, 25, 54 and 22 percent, respectively, over the past decade.² Canada's copper smelting and refining capacity is now concentrated in only two aging, capital-intensive facilities operating in an increasingly challenging global market.³ Persistent market distortions, low treatment and refining charges, rising energy, labour and regulatory compliance costs, and competition from heavily supported processing capacity abroad continue to erode the competitiveness of Canadian operations.

² Mining Association of Canada, *Facts & Figures 2026*.

³ Mining Association of Canada, *Facts & Figures 2026*.

To depress you further, it was also during this time that we began to witness the acquisition of Canadian mining companies by foreign multinationals. Gone were the household names of Alcan, Inco, Noranda and Falconbridge. We became more dependent on foreign investment to sustain our mining industry.

But We Didn't Give Up

During this period, Canada's mining industry lost ground but stayed strong, batting above our declining weight due to a reputation acquired over decades that takes time to erode. More importantly, we adapted, because if I've learned one thing about the culture of the Canadian mining sector it's that it's deeply pragmatic. We may complain about change, but then we get on with it.

In the 1990s, when the environmental movement was just starting to challenge the mining industry in a more serious way, and when

Indigenous rights were strengthening in the courts, miners in Canada did something that, to this day, miners in no other country have even attempted.

The Whitehorse Mining Initiative was a two-year conversation between the mining industry and all its stakeholders: organized labour, NGOs, governments and, most importantly, Indigenous rights holders. The Initiative concluded with a set of commitments or objectives, outlining a new way for everyone to work together. Sadly, it concluded without any follow-up mechanism and, once over, the parties returned to their day jobs and life largely carried on as before, though lessons had been learned.

The WMI was the backdrop to two other major undertakings. These same pesky Canadians that dreamt up WMI went on to convince the global mining industry that they should do something similar, and thus the Global Mining Initiative was launched in the early 2000s, led again by Canadians like former ICMM President Tony Hodge, Jim

Cooney and Order of Canada Member Glenn Sigurdson, also with us today. Meanwhile, at MAC, our board wrestled with the frustration that the WMI had accomplished so much but then stopped.

Determined, the MAC Board launched a process in 1999 to determine how to pick up the pieces. Five years later, Towards Sustainable Mining, or TSM, was launched.

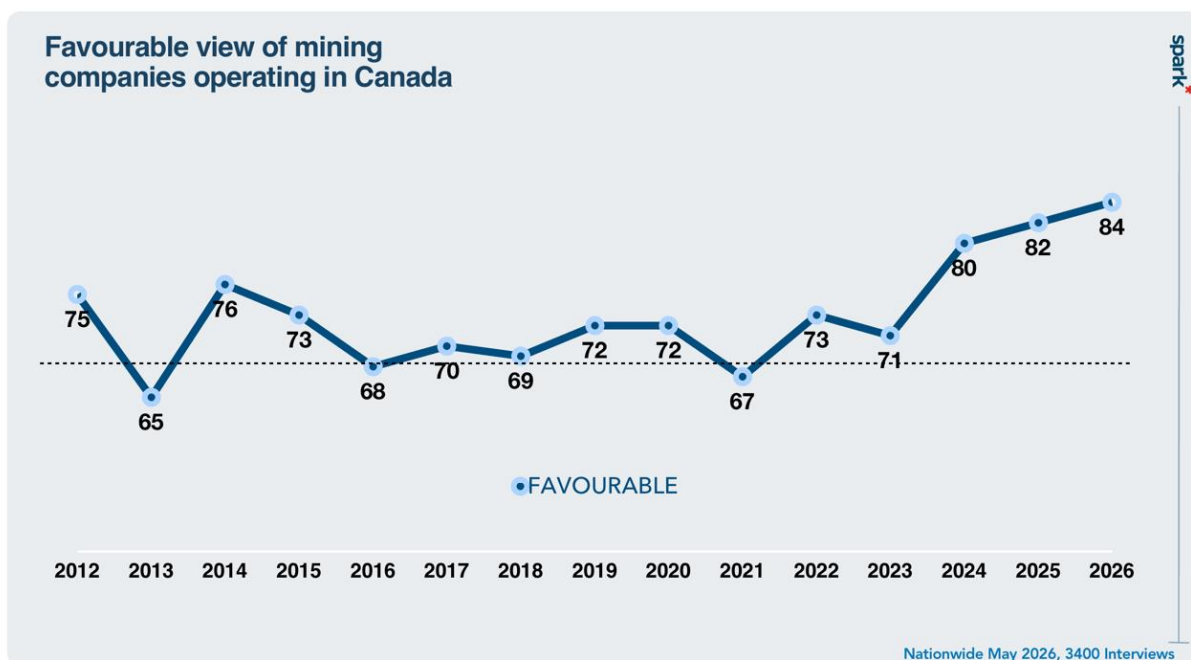
As you know, or as you now know having heard my introduction, I had a lot to do with the development of TSM. It was a “project” I was given just three months on the job when I knew next to nothing about mining. While I’m often credited with TSM, the fact is that it became what it is because of people like my boss at the time, Gordon Peeling and others in our industry like Jim Cooney, Ross Gallinger, Craig Ford, John Carrington, Jim Carter, Richard Ross, Anne Marie Toutant, Louise Grondin, Tara Shea, Katherine Gosselin, Shirley Neault and last, but not least, MAC’s incoming CEO Ben Chalmers. And many others.

TSM emerged as the first site level mining standard that involved third party assurance and multi-stakeholder oversight. It was unique and well ahead of its time. Its influence on the development of subsequent mining standards — and there are now many, too many in fact — has been profound. TSM has been adopted by mining associations in 13 other countries including mining powerhouses like Australia, Brazil and Mexico. Over the past four years, MAC has brought our quarter century of TSM experience to the table in the development of the soon to be launched Consolidated Mining Standard.

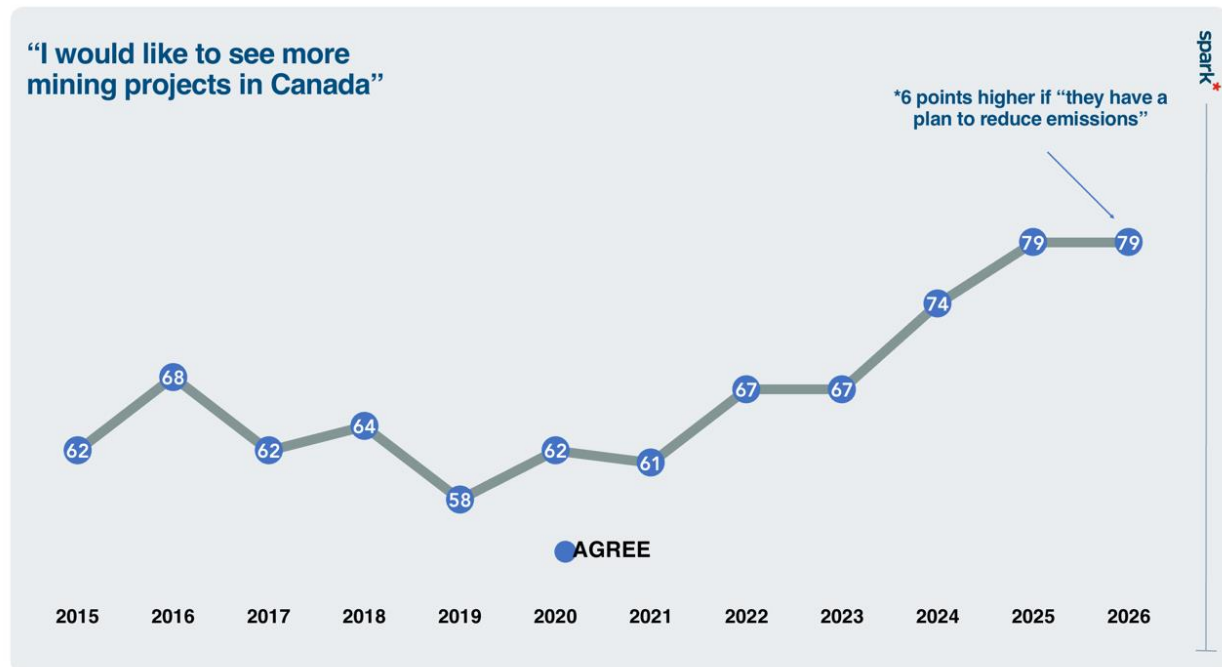
To me, TSM invokes a chicken and egg question. Did the mining industry in Canada transform because of TSM? Or did a transforming Canadian mining industry give birth to TSM? It's a bit of both. Regardless, TSM illustrates how we do business today. We engage deeply with our communities of interest, we strive continuously to improve our environmental, safety and social

performance. We are very transparent and honest. We fully respect Indigenous rights and are contributing more than any other sector to Indigenous prosperity and reconciliation.

The result: a mining sector that is no longer avoided but is embraced. We've been tracking Canadian perceptions of the mining sector for 15 years. Have a look at this slide showing the trend over this time. Look what's been happening since 2021.

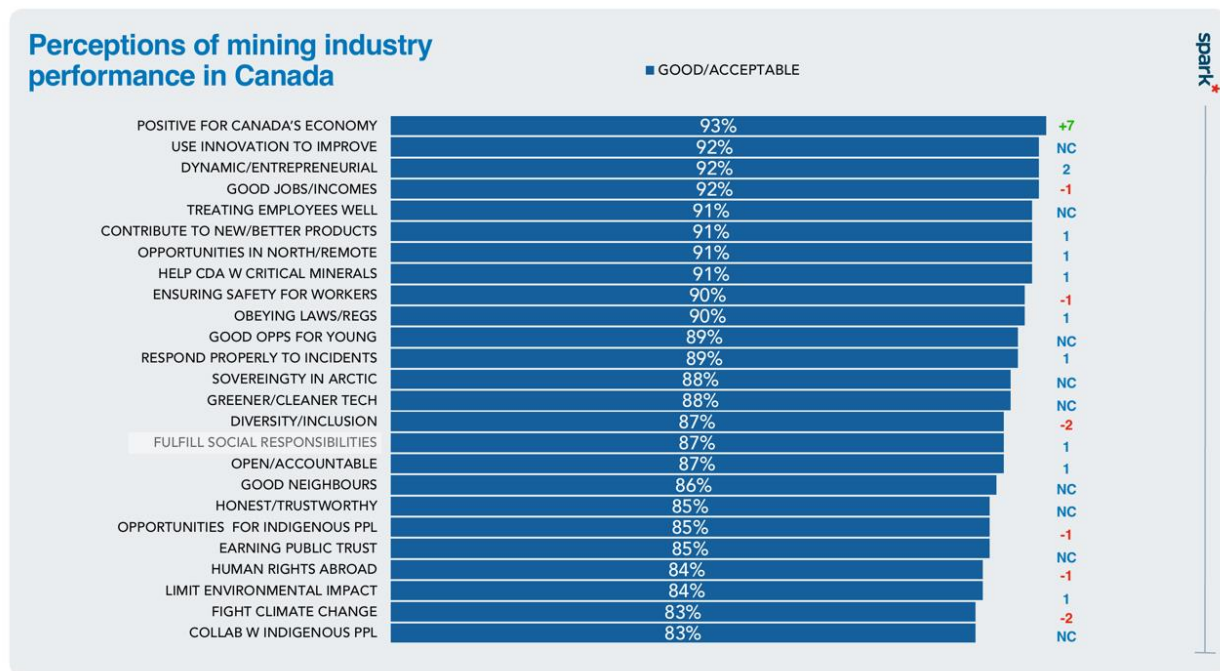


When asked if Canadians would like to see more mining projects, the trend is similar though it began earlier.

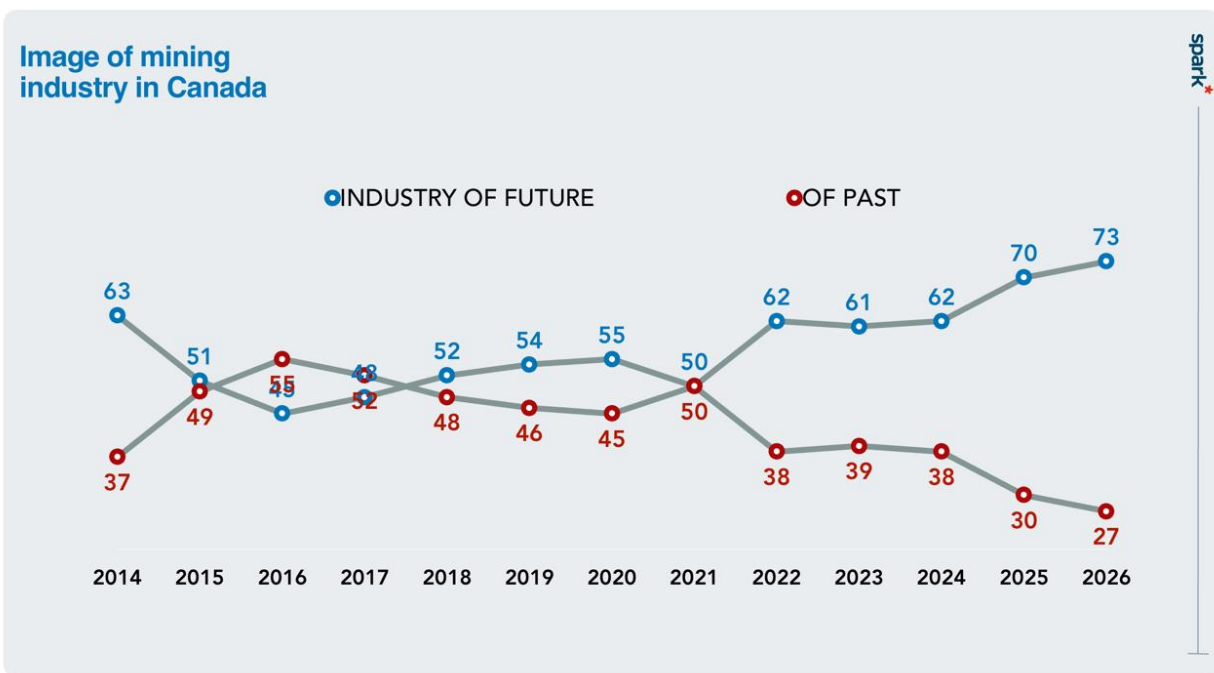


Now, part of this is probably due to the discourse around critical minerals that has been going on for a decade or so. Canadians are becoming more aware of how critical our products are to the energy transition, national security, health care and much more. But the upswing is due to more than that.

When asked perceptions across a range of themes, mining scores about 80 percent across the board.

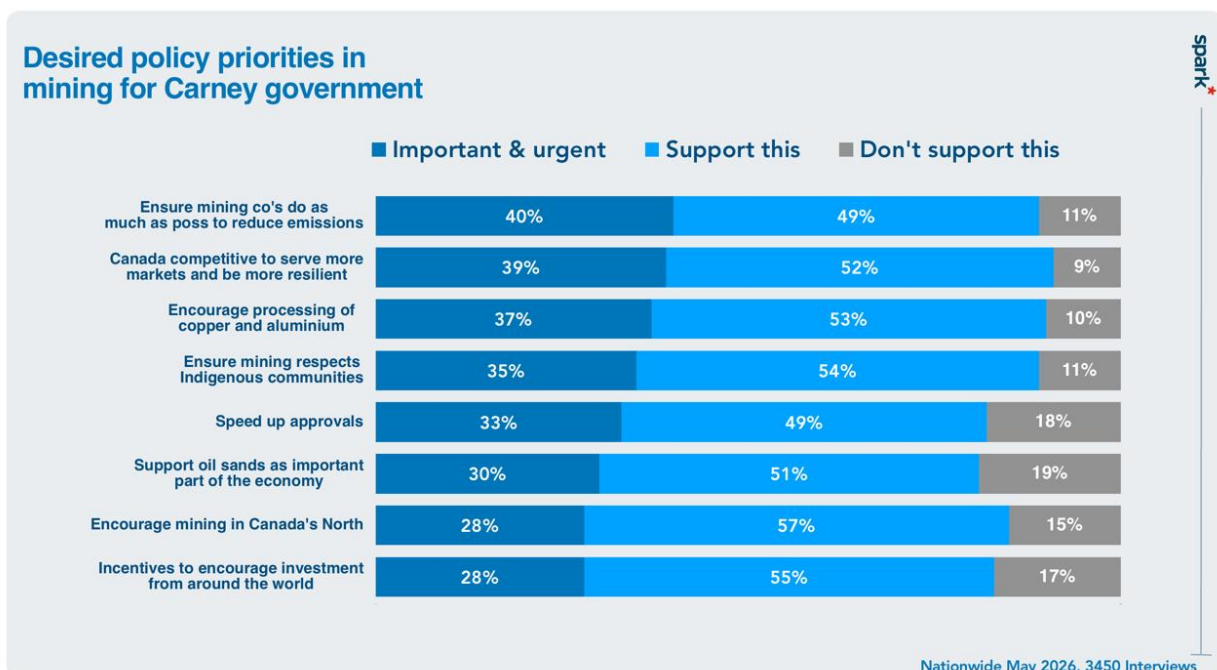


When asked specifically about how mines manage their environmental and social responsibilities, the numbers that think we don't are now very low. When asked whether mining is an industry of the past (a sunset industry) or an industry of the future, strong majorities now believe the latter.



This kind of support translates to a more favourable policy environment. Mining is no longer a source of friction. Rather, supporting our sector is seen as a good thing by a large majority of Canadians. It is not a situation I see replicated in other major mining jurisdictions around the world, where governments are more tepid in

promoting mining investment or meet more resistance when doing so. There are very few, if any, countries I'm aware of where mining enjoys this level of public support.



A New World

Which brings us to today.

Our industry is smaller than it was but not small. And it's bouncing back.

Gold has been the big story of the past decade, with production up 31% over the past decade and climbing as yet more gold mines open. We've moved up into 4th spot globally as a gold producer and Canada is now home to two of the top three gold mining companies, while the merger of Anglo and Teck will create a new, critical mineral powerhouse based here in Vancouver. McIlveen, Canada's first greenfield copper/zinc mine in over a decade has begun production in Saskatchewan. Glencore completed its Onaping Depth project at its fully-electric Craig nickel mine. Vale has completed the first phase of an upgrade to its Clarabelle mill in Sudbury that will increase production of copper and nickel, and has several new potential nickel mine expansions. The Red Chris expansion is awaiting FID, while several other copper mines are in the queue.

There's little resistance to any of the new projects coming online. Opposition is scarce, critics few and far between. Governments across the country are actively promoting our sector. It's popular these days to talk about the lost decade of the Trudeau years, but

federal support for critical minerals began under Trudeau, accelerated and intensified by the new Carney government.

Federally, we've seen favourable policies across the board:

- Infrastructure investments, such as the First and Last Mile Fund
- Tax credits, such as the Clean Technology Manufacture Investment Tax Credit
- Direct investments through mechanisms like the G7 Alliance, the Critical Minerals Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Canada Growth Fund, the latter supporting enhancements to Teck's Trail Facility to increase production of germanium, gallium and antimony.

And then, in September, Prime Minister Carney announced the new "Productivity Mega Deduction", a tax reform whose impact will be transformative. Mining projects require enormous upfront investment. The ability to deduct these investments sooner will improve project cash flow and net present value, lower the effective cost of investments in equipment and mine development and could help turn some marginal projects into going concerns.

On the regulatory side, the story is similarly encouraging. Canada has gone from one cooperation agreement on Impact Assessment with BC to an agreement with every province except Saskatchewan (and I'm told it's coming). New IAs are significantly tailored, with the industry focused strictly on federal jurisdiction. Processes are getting noticeably faster – one project in Quebec hit an IAA milestone this year a year faster than the previous project.

Reforms to the *Fisheries Act* regulations were made last June. While not sweeping, they are improvements and DFO is finally picking up the pace. Last month, Transport Canada unveiled its plans to improve regulations under the *Navigable Waters Act*.

Two weeks ago, the Carney government tabled Bill C-39, a sweeping bill that contains many of the permitting reforms MAC has been seeking for the past few years. We continue to press the government to amend the *IA* project list to exclude brownfield expansions, fully-electric underground mines and to raise thresholds.

It is clear from these and a host of other actions that Canada's minerals and metals sector is seen as a cornerstone of economic growth.

The payoff will be huge. Growing the mining sector means more of the highest paying jobs in the country, an improved balance of trade, a stronger logistics supply chain that supports other industries, huge economic spin-offs, significant opportunities for Indigenous communities and the potential to diversify our economy and insulate it from the impact of tariffs on the Canadian economy. Because, as you know, mined products remain largely exempt from tariffs and there is no shortage of customers.

The sense of optimism is growing in our industry, despite the friction with the United States. Oilsands miners, after what was for them a lost decade, are increasingly bullish. Canadian lithium and graphite production is coming on line. Next year, the Jansen potash mine — the largest mining investment in Canadian history to date — begins production and our dominance of the potash industry will be unshakeable, regardless of any deal between Belarus and the US.

Demand for critical minerals such as copper, nickel, graphite, and lithium is still expected to grow by at least 71 percent by 2030. All of Canada's political leaders all want Canada to seize this opportunity and are promoting mining in a way that I've never seen. Our trading partners and allies count on Canada for a secure and stable supply of these critical materials. We are truly not a sunset industry, but a

strategic sector whose importance at this point in our history has rarely been so great or appreciated.

Closing Remarks

The sector is shining, the future is bright, its importance to Canada at this critical moment is central. The only thing in mining walking into the sunset right now is me.

I thank all of you for your support, friendship over the years. I thank the VBOT for always welcoming me here to Canada's most beautiful city to address you. I thank Canada's mining sector for giving me such a wonderful career.

Thank you.