
[Costa Rica: Nicoya Gulf and drinking water in the region endangered by gold-mining](#)

Mining is one of the activities that international allocation of labour has imposed on the countries of the South, rich in natural resources. However, in no case has it led to the general welfare of the country; on the contrary, it could be considered a curse (see WRM Bulletin No. 71).

In Costa Rica, the Gold-mining Opposition Committee has been active in denouncing the numerous and devastating impacts of mining, related to mining in itself, the elimination of mine waste, transportation of the mineral and its processing, often involving or producing hazardous materials.

On 30 January 2001, in spite of strong opposition on the part of the communities and the municipality, the Government of Costa Rica authorized the Canadian company, Glencairn to carry out an open cast mining project with leaching (that is to say, the application of chemicals, in this case, cyanide, to filter and separate the metal from the other minerals). The project expects to extract 560 thousand ounces of gold in a little less than seven years, by-producing 15 million tons of waste.

The Glencairn mine was opened at 14 kilometres from the Nicoya Gulf, a very beautiful marine estuary, with rocky islands and cliffs, an extensive mangrove habitat and exceptionally high biodiversity. The Gulf has four islands that have been designated Wildlife Refuges, and the Palo Verde National Park, Costa Rica's most important wetland, hosting a wide variety of endangered fauna. There are also 5 thousand artisan fisher-people whose livelihood depends on this Gulf.

Open cast mines generally imply the elimination of the vegetation in the area, widespread dynamiting and the removal of rocks and the material above the ore until the bed is reached, and then this is again dynamited to obtain smaller pieces. These activities may have caused the recent landslides in the Ciruelas River, in the zone near the mine, an area already prone to landslides mainly during the period of flooding. The added danger is that this cyanide-contaminated earth, on reaching the river will compromise the drinking water supply to the city of Miramar and the rich estuary of the Nicoya Gulf.

Based on the complaints lodged by the Gold-mining Opposition Committee, the Association of Ecological Community Users of the Nicoya Gulf (Asociación de Comunidades Ecologistas Usuarias del Golfo de Nicoya – CEUS del Golfo) has requested the National Environmental Technical Secretariat (Secretaría Técnica Nacional del Ambiente – SETENA) to investigate the landslides, that could either be the result of the impact of the building works on the fragile terrain of the region or of the removal of earth to do the building works. They have also urged people to write to the company and to the Government of Costa Rica (presidente@casapres.go.cr; vicem@minae.go.cr; thr@thr.go.cr; pgonzalez@poder-judicial.go.cr; rojasc@casapres.go.cr), asking them to “stop gold-mining in Miramar because you do not do business destroying the water and the Nicoya Gulf.”

Article based on information from: “Mentiras ambientales ponen en peligro el agua de Miramar y la vida marina del Golfo de Nicoya,” CEUS, e-mail: soniatorres@racsa.co.cr ; “Costa Rica: minería de oro destruye alta biodiversidad del Golfo de Nicoya,”

<http://www.biodiversidadla.org/article/articlestatic/4178/1/7/> ; "Minas de oro amenazan contaminar con cianuro ecosistemas de Costa Rica," ADITAL,
<http://www.adital.org.br/asp2/noticia.asp?idioma=ES¬icia=10513>