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## Minnesota Attorney General Ellison asked to step in on Glencore's purchase of PolyMet



The letter to Ellison is the latest call for greater oversight of push for copper-nickel mining near Boundary Waters.

By [Jennifer Bjorhus](#) Star Tribune

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More than two dozen environmental and citizen groups are asking Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison to investigate Glencore's new ownership of PolyMet Mining and its copper-nickel mine, saying that type of mining "could put both Minnesota finances and natural resources in danger."

The letter, sent Monday, asks Ellison to use his broad investigatory authority to examine whether Toronto-based PolyMet properly characterized and disclosed its relationship to Switzerland-based global mining giant Glencore. It also asks whether the state's interests are adequately protected since the various permits — including a financial assurance package — were approved for PolyMet, and not for Glencore.

The groups also ask Ellison to look into the Glencore's history "as an international bad actor" and what that could mean for Minnesota. Both the U.S. Justice Department and the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission are investigating the publicly-traded company for [possible corruption](#).

The letter is signed by Steve Morse, executive director of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, along with 24 other organizations such as Duluth for Clean Water, the Northern Lakes Scientific Advisory Panel and the Austin Coalition for Environmental Sustainability.

In an interview, Morse said he thinks "the silence is deafening from some of our elected officials."

"I think it's rather astounding that there's not more scrutiny of this project and this international bad actor company, by people in elected positions," Morse said. Ellison issued a brief statement in response to the letter. "Whenever Minnesotans bring issues that are important to them to my office, we listen, we take them seriously, and we look into them," the statement said. "That's what we've started to do in this case."

PolyMet spokesman Bruce Richardson downplayed the significance of the letter. "This is just one more in a long string of attempts by environmental groups to stop the PolyMet Project," he said via e-mail. "As a publicly traded corporation, PolyMet has met all of its financial disclosure obligations in addition to its environmental regulatory commitments."

The mine will be located on the Iron Range in northeast Minnesota, near Babbitt at the site of a defunct taconite mine. The project is fully permitted now and close to becoming the state's first hard rock — not iron ore or taconite — mine. The company estimates it will create 360 full-time jobs. Construction will start after the company arranges nearly \$1 billion in financing, a process that could "take a few months" the company said. Supporter of the mine, eager for the economic boost it will provide to the Iron Range, have welcomed Glencore's involvement, saying it has the deep financial resources to get such a large project up and running.

But opposition to the project has been strong for years, from environmentalists and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa whose land is downstream of the mine site. They're concerned about polluted mine drainage contaminating the St. Louis River, nearby wetlands and Lake Superior.

Sen. John Marty, a Roseville Democrat, applauded the move to involve Ellison, saying: "I think they're right on track with it."

Marty indicated that he and a group of lawmakers were planning more action on PolyMet in the next few days, but he wouldn't elaborate. Marty recently called on Gov. Tim Walz to suspend PolyMet's permits until there is a review of the permitting process. Three such inquiries and investigations are already underway.

"It's hard to see it as anything other than a really lousy rigged process," Marty said. Both the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) told the Star Tribune recently that they are reviewing the many permits they approved for PolyMet's mine in light of Glencore's new ownership. Agency officials were not immediately available for comment Monday.

There are [three ongoing inquiries](#) into the PolyMet mine project, but they focus on how state pollution regulators and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) handled the mine's water quality permit, which regulates the pollutants the company can discharge into water from the mine such as arsenic, mercury and lead.

At issue are revelations that the MPCA approved the water pollution permit in December over significant concerns of the EPA, and how those reservations appear to have been deliberately kept out of the public record. After an [MPCA assistant commissioner](#) asked the EPA last year not to submit its written comments during the public comment period, the agency waited. An EPA staffer read comments to the MPCA quickly over the telephone after the public comment period had been closed for weeks.

The extent of the EPA's unresolved concerns only became clear last week when a 29-page EPA memo from December was leaked to the union representing employees of the EPA Region 5 office in Chicago. The union [provided it to the Star Tribune](#).

The EPA Region 5 office in Chicago oversees Minnesota's enforcement of federal pollution laws such as the Clean Water Act.