

Dear Panel:

This letter is in opposition to the practice of fracking in Newfoundland and Labrador. I will not be making an economic argument against fracking because it is pointless. As long as it is possible to extract oil and gas from Earth for a price that is cheaper than it sells, and as long as a price tag can be attached to the cost to clean up spills and other immediate negative side effects, fracking will be viable and, therefore, approved. Further, concerned citizens are well aware of the negative environmental risks and impacts of fracking. A simple Internet search will provide reams of data and reports that can take weeks or months to read. Some jurisdictions have embraced fracking while others have banned it. The decision to approve or ban fracking boils down to what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want as their legacy to future generations.

This letter focuses on the long-term negative impact fracking will have on Newfoundland, the world and humanity at large. Let us first consider the social impact on Newfoundland. As someone who grew up in Newfoundland, returns home to visit most years, and who wishes to spend much of my retirement there, it is a heart-rendering for me to consider the impact fracking will have on the quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The island is a wonder of geography, one of the last bastions on Earth of peace, solitude and clean air, water and land. The west coast is also home to Gros Morne National Park and a United Nations World Heritage Site.

What will fracking do to this eco-system and the social environment? As you can see on many YouTube videos, the highways in the area would have to support the massive trucks and equipment required to do the fracking. Exploitation of local ponds would be required for the millions of gallons of water required for the fracking process. Large holding ponds would need building to contain the fracking waste. Local hotels/motels would be booked for the largely migrant workers. Local eateries, bars and entertainment facilities will temporarily derive income from them.

Tourists and returning citizens would experience a very different culture than they would otherwise if the government were to permit fracking. For a few years, the west coast of Newfoundland would be a beehive of industrial noise and activity. Fracking would create few permanent jobs and local residents would garner little income from the intrusion. Over the long-term, those citizens must live with what is left behind – threats of water and air contamination from the holding ponds and deteriorating oil wells. The government of Newfoundland would garner a portion of the oil revenue through taxation, while tourism revenue would be threatened in the event of an environmental mishap.

The question that must be asked: Is it in Newfoundland's long-term interest to allow fracking for oil?

Based on the potential social and environmental impact of fracking, it is difficult to validate the need, let alone the desire, of bringing this type of high-risk heavy industry to such a pristine place.

Even more important, are the long-term consequences of extracting and burning fossil fuels. To restrict the fracking debate to local social, environmental and economic considerations is akin to excluding Newfoundland from the world map. It is scientifically, politically and socially irresponsible to maintain a parochial view, when the impact of extracting and burning fossil fuels is well documented and grounded in scientific research. Suggesting that global climate change and warming is not real is like saying gravity does not exist. Just because you cannot see it, does not mean it is not there. The global consensus, as documented by the International Panel on Climate Change, under the auspices of the United Nations, is unequivocal in its position that fossil fuels are the number one culprit in rising temperatures, and therefore, rising oceans and deadly weather systems. I will not go into all the evidence in this letter because it is thoroughly researched, documented and easily obtained. If someone were to say he does not believe human activity causes climate change, he says it out of ignorance of the body of scientific evidence that is available.

Therefore, the important question we must ask: Who is culpable for the death and destruction that will inevitably occur as climate change quickens? Would the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel be accessories to one of the greatest crimes against humanity ever committed, if they recommend the approval of fracking? Would the Newfoundland and Labrador government, and the Government of Canada, be culpable by allowing the growth in fossil fuel extraction, transportation and burning.

So the question remains: Is fracking good for Newfoundland and Labrador? The evidence indicates fracking will have, at best, a modest, short-term economic benefit. The social and environmental outlook is frightening. The worsening of global warming is unconscionable. Therefore, the long-term risks of fracking overwhelmingly outweigh the benefits. Newfoundland and Labrador must ban fracking to maintain its pristine environment, its friendly, amenable, social fabric and to provide leadership in the battle against global climate change.

Newfoundland – The Happy Province, but for how long?