

CPAWS welcomes NL Fracking Panel call for extended moratorium and buffer zone around Gros Morne

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ST. JOHN'S - CPAWS welcomes today's report from the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel that calls for continuing the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in Newfoundland and Labrador, and for a large buffer zone to be created around Gros Morne National Park to safeguard this iconic World Heritage Site.

"Today's report is an important step forward for the province and for Gros Morne National Park and World Heritage Site," said Suzanne Dooley, Executive Director of CPAWS NL Chapter. "The Fracking Panel has listened to Newfoundlanders and recognized the importance of ensuring the long term integrity of Gros Morne National Park."

The Panel noted the concern they heard that "industrial activity around Gros Morne National Park could threaten its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site or could negatively impact the enclave communities around the Park that have developed a tourism industry based largely on Gros Morne"

To address this threat, the Panel recommended that a buffer zone be established around the park "to ensure that future industrial activity, including both onshore and offshore oil and gas development, does not negatively impact on the Park, its World Heritage Site designation, or the tourism industry that is developing around the Park. The establishment of a buffer zone should follow an open and transparent process that is informed by the UNESCO 2015 Operational Guidelines and involves relevant stakeholders, including the provincial and federal governments, local communities and businesses, local NGOs, and other relevant experts."

A public opinion survey conducted by the Panel found that over 90 % of western Newfoundlanders support or strongly support the creation of a buffer zone around the park.

The Fracking Panel's recommendation follows closely on the heels of a similar draft recommendation released publicly on May 27th that will be considered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at their July meeting, calling for Canada to establish a buffer zone around the park to safeguard the park's outstanding universal value.

Since the creation of the park over 40 years ago, local communities, in partnership with governments and private investors, have built a sustainable tourism economy based on the spectacular natural beauty of Gros Morne. This has become the centrepiece of the province's billion-dollar tourism economy. Gros Morne's World Heritage designation is a critical asset for the provincial and regional tourism economy.

"Both the Fracking Panel and UNESCO have recognized that the park's integrity and its World Heritage status are vulnerable to the impacts of oil and gas development," said Ms. Dooley.

"Next we need the provincial and federal governments to start working with local communities to determine what the buffer zone will look like." Says Ms. Dooley. "The full involvement of local communities is crucial in creating the buffer zone." CPAWS has been working with concerned local residents for more than three years to help gain support for the buffer zone.

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