

Chief Mi'sel Joe supports efforts of local fracking awareness group



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Despite a meeting on the issue of hydraulic fracturing being cut short by a fire in the community, Miawpukek First Nation Chief Mi'sel Joe learned enough for his band council's presentation to government.



Mi'sel Joe is shown in this undated photo. Submitted photo

Graham Oliver of Kippens and Kenny (Moochie) Bennett of Stephenville Crossing, both representatives of the Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group, made the trip to Conne River on Monday to meet with Joe and the Conne River Band Council to make a presentation on concerns about fracking and the importance of making submissions to the Fracking Review Panel.

While the guests were in the middle of their presentation, said Joe, they were informed there was a fire at the town dump. The chief said there was fear it might spread into the forest, preventing people from leaving the town.

"But I got enough information since I was already to two of their (fracking awareness group) sessions in Stephenville and Corner Brook," he said.

Joe and the band council are now preparing a submission to present to the review panel.

Some environmental and citizen groups, including the awareness group, have voiced concerns that none of the five panelists selected by the provincial government are women, nor do they represent First Nations or live on the west coast of the province — the area that would be most affected by fracking.

Joe feels hydraulic fracturing should be a concern to all people, not just aboriginal people.

"Everyone should be concerned about what's going into our lands, our rivers and our environment," he said. "Once the government of Newfoundland and Labrador gives permission (for fracking) it will be all over for this province."

He said people can no longer say "as long as it's not on my doorstep," because once it's legislated it can take place anywhere in the province. Joe feels it's every Newfoundlander's place to get involved in this debate.

He said he's not against hydraulic fracturing as long as it can be done safely, but added every bit of information he's heard on it so far is that it can't be done safely and that places have been polluted where the controversial gas extraction method has been applied.

"We are the protectors of our land for our children's children and we have to be concerned about everything on the land, from water to wildlife and especially people," Joe said.

In addition to his band council writing a letter of protest to the Fracking Review Panel, it will be writing the government representatives to let them know the Conne River Band Council is opposed to this type of exploration.