

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR THE INDEPENDENT.CA

Buy a at our online store! THE INDEPENDENT.CA

Sunday Indygestion Weekly Newsletter

Your email address [Sign up](#)

Popular Recent

1. If you can't lead, then get out
2. "How much do we have to give up before we say that's enough?"
3. Escaping poverty through the library
4. "There has never been a more important time to support independent media." #GoIndy2015
5. The merchant days are over

SEARCH

“ @IndependentNL

ICYMI: "HOW MUCH DO WE HAVE TO GIVE UP BEFORE WE SAY THAT'S ENOUGH?"

[HTTPS://T.CO/02G73TEY1U](https://t.co/02G73TEY1U)

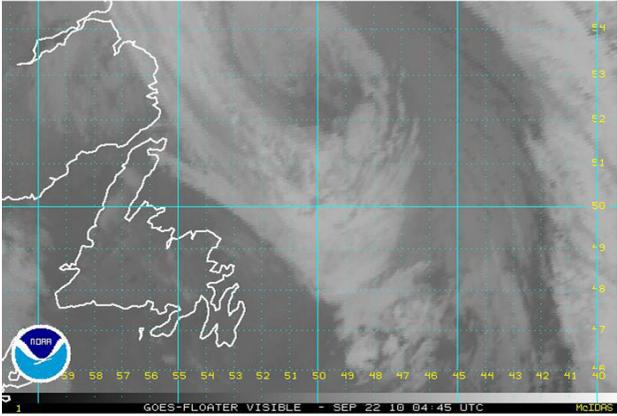
#MUSKRATFALLS #NLPOLI

[HTTPS://T.CO/MNDS6VF5P6](https://t.co/MNDS6VF5P6)

”

Climate change not a priority for NL fracking review panel

By: [Justin Brake](#) | November 23, 2014
[Tweet](#) [G+](#) 2 [Recommend](#) 311



Unless we curb greenhouse gas emissions, extreme weather will become more frequent and more intense. In 2010 Hurricane Igor—one of the worst storms to ever hit the Island—caused damage to the tune of \$200 million, claimed one life and isolated approximately 150 communities. Military personnel were brought in to assist in recovery efforts and aid distribution. Photo by born1945 via [Flickr Commons](#).

It may be the most pressing issue of our time, but the chair of NL's recently appointed fracking review panel says climate change is "not what the panel's about"

Climate change will not be a priority for the province's recently announced fracking review panel.

The government-appointed panel has been tasked with assessing the hypothetical use of the controversial method of fossil fuel extraction in western Newfoundland. It has until October 2015 to present its final report to government, including a recommendation on whether or not fracking should be permitted in the province.

In a recent interview fracking review panel chair Ray Gosine told *The Independent* that the committee's terms of reference are "to consider the implications of a particular type of oil and gas extraction in a particular geographic region, and within a particular socioeconomic context," and that considering fracking in the context of climate change is "not what the panel's about."

Natural Resources Minister Derrick Dalley told *The Independent* that while the issue of climate change may come forward during the review process discussions, and while the "point may be widely held" that we need to be decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels and that climate change should be a primary consideration for the fracking review panel, he "suspect[s] there's also viewpoints widely held that... there is a tremendous need for fossil fuels at this point in time in our history."

Dalley noted that the "economic value and benefit" of oil and gas present "a strong argument" for the fossil fuel industry as a major part of our economy.

Whether or not fracking ought to be permitted in the province after considering both its relationship with climate change and the province's economic needs "depends on your perspective," he said. "It depends on the balance that you try and stake here."

Climate change intensifying

The fracking review comes at a time when [extreme weather events](#) in North America and around the world are increasing both in frequency and intensity as a direct consequence of anthropogenic climate change, exacerbated by rising greenhouse gas emissions—largely from the burning of fossil fuels like oil, coal and petroleum—which are driving up the concentration of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere.

Last month both NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) declared October 2014 the [hottest October on record](#) in terms of global temperatures.

On Tuesday the United States experienced record cold, with temperatures dropping below zero in every state, including parts of Hawaii. Despite the major fluctuation, climate scientists are saying that barring a very cold December, 2014 is [on track to be the hottest year on record](#) globally.

Meanwhile, last July marked the warmest month on record for St. John's, with temperatures rising above 25 degrees Celcius 19 out of 31 days.

In recent years Newfoundland has seen an increase in the number of storms characterized by high winds that have caused severe damage to infrastructure.

According to a 2013 study by MUN climatologist Joel Finnis the weather in this province will become [warmer, wetter and less predictable](#) over the next 50 years. The same research also showed that the province will see a two to four degree temperature increase by 2050.

Rising global temperatures are also threatening a [mass extinction of ocean life](#), an outcome that could

be devastating for the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who depend on various fisheries for their livelihood.

According to the Climate Institute website, if we stay on our current trajectory "the productivity and even the survival of thousands of marine species [are] at risk."

In August University of Ottawa PhD student and Happy Valley-Goose Bay native Robert Way released a study indicating Labrador has been [warming at twice the rate of other regions](#) of the world, a trend that is already threatening coastal communities where people depend on snow and sea ice for transportation and access to hunting grounds where they get their traditional foods.

Earlier this month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the [final part of its Fifth Assessment Report](#), the most comprehensive and widely recognized study on climate change in the world. The report, authored by hundreds of the world's leading climate scientists, says by continuing to emit greenhouse gases we will "cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems."

Furthermore, it concludes, "limiting climate change would require substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions which, together with adaptation, can limit climate change risks."

Among the more grim predictions for our future, the Millennium Project's 2009 State of the Future report said if greenhouse gases are not curbed to make way for sustainable growth, ["billions of people will be condemned to poverty and much of civilisation will collapse."](#)

Fracking boom comes to Newfoundland

Over the past decade fracking has exploded across North America and parts of Europe as the oil and gas industry and governments work together to capitalize on reserves of previously inaccessible fossil fuels that have been made accessible by advancements with the technology.

The technology and the overall process around fracking is still evolving, however, so the booming industry doesn't come without its share of problems.

Requiring [millions of gallons of water](#) to frack a single well, fracking places a high demand on local water supplies. There is potential for groundwater contamination. Oil companies are not required by law to disclose all of the chemicals they use in the fracking process, meaning unknown hazardous chemicals are being transported through communities, injected into the ground, partially extracted and stored somewhere, which leads to the question of [where to store the toxic wastewater](#).

People living near fracking operations have also [complained of air pollution](#), and a recent study in New York found [evidence of cancer-causing chemicals](#) near fracking sites.

People have also expressed concerns over the flow of heavy trucks and equipment moving in and out of their towns, and the toll that will take on their roads and bridges.

On the climate change front, some researchers claim fracking contributes more to the problem than is largely assumed, by way of poor well integrity and methane leakage, otherwise known as fugitive emissions.

The Nova Scotia fracking review panel recently addressed the problem in its final report: "Due to lack of knowledge regarding long-term material resilience in deep wells, the potential longer term (e.g. greater than 100 years) liabilities of future gas leakage into the atmosphere or seepage into local groundwater cannot be calculated at this time; this emphasizes the need for effective long-term monitoring, as well as the local level modelling of risks in the short, medium, and long terms."

Communities thinking of taking the risk may be interested in the work of Cornell University engineering professor [Anthony Ingraffea](#), whose research focuses on physical testing of complex fracturing processes. Ingraffea has co-authored multiple research papers on well integrity and the problem of well leakage and fugitive methane emissions.

In a [2013 interview with The Tyee](#) he told journalist Andrew Nikiforuk that "[f]luid migration from faulty wells is a well-known chronic problem with an expected rate of occurrence."

Nikiforuk, an award-winning investigative journalist who has been covering the oil and gas industry in western Canada for almost 20 years, concluded the article: "The health implications are also serious. The migration of methane or fracking fluid has repeatedly contaminated groundwater across North America or polluted the atmosphere with methane, a potent greenhouse gas."

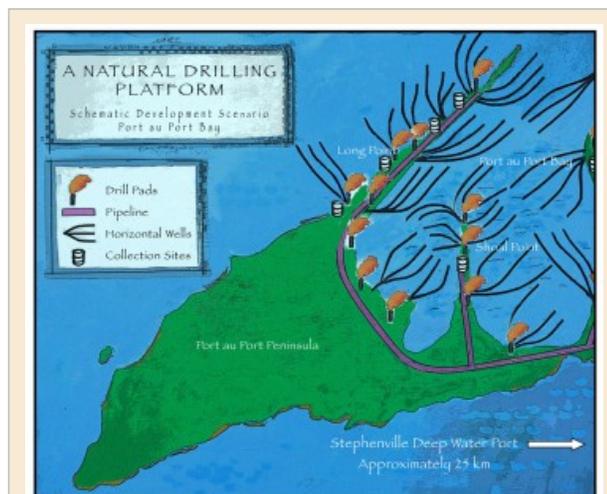
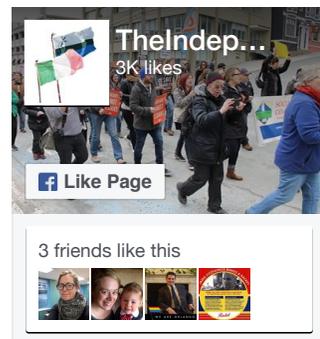
Ingraffea and fellow Cornell researcher Robert Howarth, an environmental biology professor, claim fracking in fact [contributes more to climate change](#) than conventional methods of oil and gas extraction.

Meanwhile, a recent study by Princeton University scientist Mary Kang of 19 abandoned oil and gas wells in Pennsylvania found them to be leaking various amounts of methane. According to a [Guardian article](#) about Kang's research, there are hundreds of thousands of abandoned wells in Pennsylvania alone, and they all could be leaking methane.

Methane is the most potent of the greenhouse gases, 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over 20 years in terms of its impact on climate change, and 34 times more potent over 100 years.

The third part of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report, released last April, argues natural gas could play an important role for economies transitioning from coal to renewable energy.

Newfoundland and Labrador does not generate energy from coal, however, and as Gosine pointed out companies who have expressed interest in fracking here have said they would be looking for shale oil, not natural gas.



West coast artist Reed Weir produced this painting based on information taken from a Shoal Point Energy slideshow presentation that depicts a "schematic development scenario" for fracking on the Port au Port Peninsula.