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Fracking report recommends continued 'pause' for now

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The provincial government's independent fracking review panel has effectively kicked the can down the road, saying that for the time being, at least, there should be a continued "pause" on hydraulic fracturing oil drilling.



Ray Gosine, chair of the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel, speaks during a public consultation in Rocky Harbour.

This follows a review of nearly two years by a team of academics and experts appointed by the previous Tory government to look at the controversial oil production technique, which is being proposed for western Newfoundland.

In a lengthy executive summary, the review panel identified a lot of different issues raised by the people who were consulted, before coming to a general conclusion.

"Returning to the primary task of making a recommendation on 'whether or not hydraulic fracturing should be undertaken in Western Newfoundland', the panel does not believe that a simple yes or no recommendation would be appropriate or responsible, especially given the

unknown and unresolved issues related to unconventional oil and gas development in the context of Western Newfoundland," the report said.

"The panel, however, unanimously recommends that a number of gaps and deficiencies must be addressed before the necessary conditions could exist that would allow for hydraulic fracturing, as an all-inclusive industrial process, to proceed reasonably and responsibly in Western Newfoundland."

The recommendations include greater public education on fracking, a better regulatory structure, and a buffer zone established around Gros Morne National Park — a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

More scientific studies are needed too, along with baseline health and environmental data collected, the panel said.

"Public confidence and trust must be treated as a priority by government and industry. Government must gain and maintain public confidence as it considers whether it will move forward from the current 'pause' in accepting applications involving hydraulic fracturing in Western Newfoundland," the report said.

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