

Maritime anti-fracking front a model of citizenry in action

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Protesters rally outside the Westin Nova Scotian during an event hosted by the Maritimes Energy Association in March 2014. The protesters were calling for an end to fracking and a rejection of the proposed Energy East pipeline. (RYAN TAPLIN / Staff)

Just over a year has passed since the Liberals' legislation to disallow fracking in the province became law. Many of us actively working toward this end celebrated this historic win after several years of supporting communities that did not envision fracking as a part of their future.

As the world heads toward an agreement to address climate change in Paris this week, we have much to be proud of as Atlantic Canadians for standing up to the fracking industry — and the model of an educated and aware electorate determining our collective future. This is one we hope will be adopted by our leaders as they speak on our behalf at the UN talks.

Much work went into achieving the legislation, including building grassroots understanding of the impacts of fracking, based on scientific evidence and documenting our experience with the fracking industry in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Faced with the threat of fracking, individuals and community groups also became focused on alternatives, such as energy efficiency and renewables.

Over the past year, we have seen more and more scientific evidence supporting our perspective, including the June 2015 draft report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Assessment of the Potential Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing for Oil and Gas on Drinking Water Resources.

In this report, the EPA concludes that although there aren't widespread, systemic issues with water because of nearby fracking operations, there is evidence of negative impacts on water, including contamination of drinking-water wells. A peer-reviewed study from researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health that analysed almost 11,000 births found that mothers who live near unconventional oil and gas wells are more likely to have premature births and high-risk pregnancies.

And despite the recent industry push on fracking, with conferences and media appeals, nothing has changed in terms of social licence or informed community consent for the industry in our region — and provincial Energy Minister Michel Samson should be congratulated for acknowledging this in his department's approach ("Nova Scotia still pondering rules for fracking" Dec. 4).

New Brunswick's government-appointed commission is reviewing whether five conditions to lift their moratorium can be met. Although its work isn't done until March, it is clear from submissions that much more opposition and evidence relating to these five conditions have been brought forward by opponents.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, an independent review panel will bring forward recommendations to the new provincial government by the beginning of February. But again, the opposition has not only more voices, but stronger evidence.

In P.E.I., the commitment to develop a Water Act has offered an opportunity for citizens to express their concerns; the regulations and policies that follow such an act will surely make it impossible for fracking to proceed.

Even though there is growing evidence that fracking is the wrong way to go, we must remain vigilant because the resources and access to power of the petroleum industry cannot be underestimated.

Industry may focus on repealing the moratoria because it understands the precedent we have set for the rest of the world. In the meantime, we encourage the governments of Atlantic Canada to focus on new "sunny ways": stop subsidizing oil and gas with access to land and water and research (not to mention tax breaks!), seize upon opportunities offered by federal programs to encourage renewables, and keep listening to constituents, who are just as committed to protecting their communities from fracking as ever.

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