

N.L. fracking review over budget

 [Ashley Fitzpatrick \(/Author-Ashley-Fitzpatrick/4279/1\)](/Author-Ashley-Fitzpatrick/4279/1)
Published on April 28, 2016

Province provides another \$150,000 to cover costs

The panel tasked with reviewing the potential use of hydraulic fracturing for oil production in Newfoundland and Labrador has not yet filed its report to the provincial government.



Siobhan Coady. — Telegram file photo

But the bills are coming in, and costs for the review are higher than expected.

The Department of Natural Resources originally set aside \$300,000 for the work, but has since increased that amount to \$450,000, according to budget documents.

“The panel members were not paid professional fees, rather this budgeted amount was provided to Memorial University to cover the costs of operations of the panel including travel and per diems, project management and other direct costs, technical experts and public consultation costs including venues, advertising, collateral materials and other expenses,” stated a

department spokeswoman, in an emailed response to questions.

“The higher than anticipated expenditures of \$450,000 was due to the amount of external consultants’ work being used by the panel, such as socio-economic modeling as detailed in the terms of reference.”

The panel — including Ray Gosine, Graham Gagnon, Maurice Dusseault, Wade Locke, and Kevin Keough — was originally expected to file a report to government in October 2015, one year after the panel itself was named.

As The Telegram reported in January, now-minister Siobhan Coady was expecting the report in “the spring.”

It is still expected this season, the department rep said Wednesday.

The panel is focused on western Newfoundland, where companies have promoted potential for shale oil projects.

Those interested companies once gathered annually at an annual Western Newfoundland Oil and Gas Symposium, hosted by the Greater Corner Brook Board of Trade.

While a moratorium tied to the fracking review has limited pursuit of oil and gas resources in the region to traditional drilling methods, limiting potential investment, the annual symposium underwent a change in 2015. The event was re-imagined as Energy West and included speakers from select businesses interested in work in the region related to solar and wind power, in addition to oil.

The provincial government once provided \$30,000 for the event, dropping that to \$20,000 in 2015. The event funding was eliminated in the latest budget.