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NL fracking panel gaining momentum

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Unassociated forum on hydraulic fracturing Feb. 1 on west coast

The panel appointed by the provincial government to review use of hydraulic fracturing is getting deeper into its work, with a first meeting complete and a key website on the way.

Ray Gosine, associate vice-president of research with Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), was appointed chairman of the review panel last year and said Tuesday the hope is to launch the new web page at some point over the next few weeks.

The site will have a description of the process for the review and, he said, a collection of documents relating to hydraulic fracturing, moving beyond what the Department of Natural Resources has already published online.

It will be a way for people to connect directly with the panel, Gosine said, and find information for their consideration.

“Our intention is ... once that page is released and the information that we have is posted, to provide a significant period of time for input and, as well, to provide for individuals or groups to have an opportunity to meet with the panel and to provide input,” he said, suggesting it may be a couple of months before the meetings and any public sessions are scheduled.

“We want to make sure people have sufficient time to (first) provide us with information that they would like to see made available,” he said, explaining people making presentations may choose to then consider the information online.

He said the panel will accept written submissions, welcome live presentations in scheduled meetings and accept input from public consultation sessions, the latter to happen on the west coast of the island.

The panel is being guided by the terms of reference set by the province. It has until Oct. 10, 2015 to file its report.

Event set for February

Meanwhile, a public event focused on fracking — organized by the Social Justice Co-operative and the Save our Seas and Shores organization — will be held at the Grenfell Campus of Memorial University in Corner Brook on Sunday, Feb. 1. The event is set for 2 p.m. in Lecture Theatre LC301 in the library building.

It will feature a different panel, including: Irené Novaczek, adjunct professor of island studies at the University of Prince Edward Island; Chief Mi'sel Joe of the Conne River Mi'kmaq Tribal Nation; and economist Michael Bradfield, a member of Nova Scotia's review panel for hydraulic fracturing.

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Jon Parsons, a member of the board of directors of co-organizer Social Justice Co-operative, said the purpose of the event is to fill in viewpoints organizers feel are missing from the ranks of the Gosine-led panel.

“We’re looking at the composition of the panel ... and seeing perspectives that are being missed. We don’t have any women on this panel. We don’t have any indigenous voices on this panel. So we’ve tried to include those voices in this forum,” Parsons said.

“Also, what we’re trying to do is extend the discussion out beyond just the immediacy of the west coast of Newfoundland, to talk about the whole bioregion that it’s a part of. You know the Gulf region and these other provinces that border onto the Gulf, most of which already have fracking bans in place.”

New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Quebec have all installed moratoriums on the use of fracking in onshore oil and gas operations.

Parsons acknowledged the organizers of the upcoming event are generally opposed to fracking.

“But I don’t think there’s really anything wrong with that,” he said, explaining they offer a different perspective and some different information from what is offered by oil industry companies, leaving individuals to ultimately decide for themselves on the topic.

Gosine said the organizers — as with those for all other fracking-related forums and public debates — are welcome to submit information to the panel for consideration.

The appointed review panel also includes: Graham Gagnon, a professor at Dalhousie University and expert in water management; Maurice Dusseault, a professor in the department of earth and environmental sciences at the University of Waterloo; Wade Locke, a professor of economics at Memorial University; and Kevin Keough, a former head of biochemistry at Memorial University and head of Kevin Keough Consulting.

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