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Port corporation calls on province to implement fracking review recommendations

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The Corner Brook Port Corporation is encouraging the province to begin the implementation of the red-stage recommendations of the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel as soon as possible.

In a press release issued Friday, the port suggests this be done with the goal of lifting the “pause” in accepting applications for hydraulic fracturing in western Newfoundland at the appropriate time.

The panel released its report earlier this week, saying the “pause” should remain in effect while some of the report’s supplementary recommendations are implemented.

Representatives from the port corporation met with members of the panel earlier this week.

The press release says the corporation is pleased the report did not recommend a permanent moratorium on fracking.

“Economic development is an integral part of our mandate and we feel that the potential for an oil and gas project or the development of an industry is worthy of serious consideration by government, particularly given the current lack of growth in the regional economy,” said corporation chair Verbon Hewlin in the release.

“... The report lays out a clear and practical path forward in terms of determining if unconventional oil and gas is a viable project or industry for western Newfoundland.”

The red-stage recommendations describe actions, primarily related to public policy and processes, that the panel feels must be undertaken before the “pause” can be lifted.

The report includes a reasonable development scenario based on currently available information about the potential size of the recoverable reserves in the Shoal Point area. “While not a “game changer” with respect to the fiscal position of the province, the report highlights that such regional economic development opportunity could be very significant to the people of western Newfoundland, and, in particular, to the people of the Stephenville-Port au Port area,” says the release. “The resulting income and employment opportunities could attract more residents which would help stabilize the population base and reduce the average age.”

Given that the size and scope of the potential reserves in western Newfoundland as a whole are not fully researched, the corporation supports the recommendation to pursue further studies, including seismographic network coverage, to better understand the potential. The corporation also supports the recommendations to address a number of gaps and efficiencies to ensure that any development proceeds in a responsible manner. These include establishing an appropriate regulatory framework for unconventional oil and gas development, creation of an ongoing public education program and establishing a buffer zone around Gros Morne National Park.

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