


Simpson pleased human impact assessment part of panel review

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Dr. Ian Simpson and his wife Sheila listen in as Ray Gosine of the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel addresses people in Port au Port.

Dr. Ian Simpson, a retired medical doctor who has been vocal about what he believes are negative effects of hydraulic fracturing, says he is pleased with a report released this week.

“This is the first hydraulic fracturing report in North America that considered a human impact assessment is necessary,” said Simpson.

Gosine and several members of the panel presented the final report to a group of about 150 people at an information session Tuesday evening at Maria Regina Parish Hall in Port au Port East.

There was applause when Gosine said the panel recommended a “pause” on hydraulic fracturing, but concern was also expressed during a question-and-answer session that there was no outright recommendation for a ban.

Simpson was satisfied with one of the recommendations about the province doing a human impact assessment.

“I’m delighted with the amount of support here,” said Simpson. “This means that we will get that two to five years that’s needed for the long term effects on pregnant woman and children from hydraulic fracturing to come out.”

His wife, Sheila Simpson, said it was wonderful to see the large turnout as it indicates there is no social license for hydraulic fracturing.

Both said they would like to see a total ban on the controversial practice.

Chief Brendan Mitchell of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band said many of his members are from the Port au Port area, which is sacred ground for the Mi'kmaq people.

Mitchell said he somewhat pleased and somewhat disappointed with the report, which he said will leave some "sitting on the fence."

He said 84 per cent of 714 Qalipu members surveyed said no to hydraulic fracturing.

He expressed concerns about the amount of tankers and tractor trailers that would be driving on narrow roads on the Port au Port Peninsula should the practice go ahead, especially with a lot of hills and a lack of guiderails in many places.

Mitchell said he couldn't see this going ahead very easily in Gros Morne National Park and was pleased to see there is also a buffer suggested for the area.

"On behalf of Qalipu members I'm suggesting we not do this at all," he said. "It should be taken beyond a pause, as I don't think we'd ever get there."

Gosine said fracking would not go ahead without a social license. He said the panel was not skirting the issue, but trying to be fair in the task they were given.

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