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Too little, not too late, say N.L. fracking opponents

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Groups jointly oppose review panel and approach

Disband the Newfoundland and Labrador fracking review panel and reject the idea of hydraulic fracturing, representatives of 12 environmental and social justice groups said Monday at a joint news conference in St. John's.



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Penny Alderdice voiced her concerns over fracking at a press conference held at Memorial University that united several groups to demand province-wide public fracking consultations.

Barring that end, they said, the panel's work needs to be expanded to include public consultation sessions throughout the province.

"Just one stop would look rather silly, so they made it two stops," said Greg Malone, who pulled no punches at the gathering in laying out his personal objections to fracking, adding he believes the appointed panel members have already made up their minds on next steps.

The five-man panel has planned for one public meeting in Corner Brook and one in Stephenville, with the option for additional teleconferencing if required.

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EDITORIAL: Frack-free state

<http://www.thetelegram.com/Opinion/Editorials/2015-05-21/article-4153500/Frack-free-state/1>

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Presentations at the meetings are being scheduled, with the panel having noted its work — as per the government-issued terms of reference — is focused on whether or not hydraulic fracturing should be permitted in western Newfoundland, as opposed to the province as a whole.

That's not good enough, said the representatives who gathered at Memorial University of Newfoundland's St. John's campus to state their disapproval.

"The actions of the people of the west coast of the island are the reason we're here today," said Paula Graham, with Social Justice Co-op N.L., explaining the panel exists as a result of vocal opponents and public rallies on the west coast, tied to specific project proposals.

The province now has a ban on fracking onshore and near shore, while the review is ongoing.

But regardless of where work is proposed, the panel's work will be relevant to the province as a whole, Graham said.

As one example, she suggested the topic be looked at in terms of climate change, calling approval for fracking in that sense "a slap in the face to humanity."

The Council of Canadians' Ken Kavanagh, meanwhile, said the province's review pales in comparison to reviews in other jurisdictions.

"If you just look to the Wheeler Report and that process in Nova Scotia, not that it was perfect, but it was a damn lot better than this process here," Kavanagh said. "They had a comprehensive set of terms of reference ... they had an 11-member panel that had a fairly broad set of expertise and experience across the panel, they made sure that there was aboriginal representation for instance, they had provincewide consultations — I think they had 11 across the entire province. We want a process something like that and this is far from that."

Yet fear of long-lasting environmental considerations in areas where fracking has been used was the touchstone for many of the speakers.

Penny Allderdice, with the Research Exchange Group at MUN, said more baseline environmental and health information is needed before fracking should be considered.

"There's no data available that tells you how many people have headaches, how many people have asthma, how many people have this. And this is to the advantage of the industry because they can say, 'Well, we had nothing to do with that. That's just normal. That's just natural,'" she said, calling for baseline studies.

Objections or no, the panel has until Oct. 10 to file a final report.

There is a website (<http://nlhfrp.ca/>) where written submissions to the review are being posted. The deadline for making a submission is June 1.

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Opposing N.L. fracking review process:

Citizens against CETA

Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides and Toxic Substances

Divest MUN

East Coast Fracking Awareness Group

NL Fracking Awareness Network

Port au Port Bay Fishery Committee

Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group

Research Exchange Group at MUN

Sandy Pond Alliance

Save Our Seas and Shores Coalition

Sierra Club Atlantic

Social Justice Co-op NL

Council of Canadians, St. John's chapter

Whaleback Nordic for a Clean and Health Environment

(Source: Statement issued at joint press conference, May 25, 2015.)

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