

Submission on

National Citizens' Dialogue: Responsible Action

Website Page: <http://www.nwmo.ca/default.aspx?DN=721,21,1,Documents>

by

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Introduction and summary

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization's (NWMO) "National Dialogue on Values" presents an interesting concept. The goal was "to conduct a citizens' dialogue with unaffiliated Canadians, to help identify the core values that are most important to Canadians" with respect to the disposition and management of used nuclear fuel. A self described "think tank" and charitable organization, Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), was employed to randomly select representative Canadians and engage them in dialogue to assess the views of the broader population on this issue. This is a daunting task, given the complexity. The short time of one day to digest and discuss a large work book must have provided a challenge for these open minded Canadians to define and divulge their values.

The authors of the report are clearly biased in their views of energy use. This is made most evident from the totally unqualified statement that "Citizens know that current patterns of energy consumption are not sustainable". It is apparent that the authors and some of the participants subscribe to the tenet promoted by many environmental groups that Canadian energy use is excessive and unwarranted. Thus, an erroneous impression is conveyed by the report that our alleged overindulgence in energy consumption can only be resolved by efficiency improvement, conservation and switching to renewable wind and solar energy. This is hot air of the worst kind.

There is sufficient renewable and sustainable energy available from nuclear fission resources to sustain and expand current energy use for many generations. Although energy use is defined to be outside the scope of the NWMO mandate, it has come into this report and clearly influences the thoughts of both the authors and participants as to how used fuel might be dealt with. Some balance is needed.

This review concludes that some revealing and useful input from a large group of Canadians was received. However, the selection of these Canadians seems far from random as claimed. The documentation provided on the selection process is not adequate to provide any understanding of how well the group chosen actually represents Canadian

values. It is recommended that more documentation be made available to the public. Should that demonstrate the chosen participants are truly representative, consideration should be given to the possibility of “reusing and recycling” them for additional consultation through the remainder of the NWMO project. My review and rationale for these findings follows.

Starting with the executive summary

The executive summary indicates early on that participants were “angry and frustrated by their lack of awareness around the issues related to used nuclear fuel”. Their mood seemed to be that they had not been sufficiently informed by governments and industry. Another paragraph indicates that “Citizens know that current patterns of energy consumption are not sustainable”. The context suggests that might be the pre-conceived opinion of the report authors too.

Still another nearby section indicates “Dialogue participants were surprised and upset that the decision to use nuclear fuel was made 30 or more years ago without a plan in place to manage the used fuel for the long-term.” That statement is followed by a heading “Adaptability - continuous improvement based on new knowledge” leading to the phrase “they wanted a flexible, step-by-step management approach that would regularly take stock of new knowledge and adapt accordingly”. There are some strong subliminal messages embedded in the words “continuous improvement” and “adaptability” and “management”. These buzz phrases suggest someone involved with the report is very familiar with the language used by a host of management consultants supplying training courses to Canadian industry over the past decade. I don’t think randomly chosen members of the public would be exposed to that language. The authors of the reports and facilitators may have been. Perhaps participants were led with an arrogant assumption that pioneers of the nuclear industry forged ahead without any consideration of how to deal with used fuel. Perhaps participants were not told of the extreme measures nuclear pioneers have taken to care for the used fuel in the short term as they develop measures for the long term.

Now I am angered, but will carry on with a deeper review before I write something I regret.

Considering the random selection process

Much emphasis is placed on the idea that the 462 participants were selected randomly, and would thus be representative of the general public. There is a reference to the [CPRN](http://www.cprn.org) website at www.cprn.org. Nine reports are posted there at this date (2005-03-06). Two “Backgrounder” reports explain the dialogue process. Backgrounder # 3 briefly describes the selection process. It indicates that 9686 people were called and questioned about their support for nuclear energy. The questioning was used to deselect individuals excessively for or against nuclear energy. The report says only 462 were chosen, possibly leaving an impression with readers the others were too biased. (I discovered later that the three Backgrounders reports are also posted on the NWMO website.)

Backgrounder #3 does reference Appendix III and IV of the main report as possibly providing more information on the selection process. Those Appendices provide some comparison of responses to a questionnaire posed to the people called and the 462 participants. The questionnaire is not provided there. It is hard to imagine that 9224 of those called could be judged too biased to be participants in the dialogue.

Reading between the lines I'm left wondering how many called were away from home, eating dinner, watching a good TV program, busy, disinterested and otherwise indisposed. Likely many had call display and did not answer. How many told the interviewers where to go? I understand a tremendous number of phones are typically called to conduct polling interviews. An example is available to the public at a page on the Canadian Nuclear Association website (<http://www.cna.ca/english/files/public%20polling/Omnibus-July03SummaryReport.pdf>). It indicates calls to 38,142 phones finally resulted in just 2,108 completed questionnaires.

Scaling up that documented experience suggests on order of 175,000 calls would be needed to generate the 9686 completed interviews claimed in the report. I would need to see the documentation to be convinced 9686 interviews were completed.

None of the reports on NWMO or CPRN seem to include the questions and data on the responses. EKOS Research Associates is identified as responsible for the polling. Perhaps they have made the data available. EKOS does have a website. There are some public domain studies there. A site search reveals no documentation for the NWMO/CPRN study.

I'm disappointed. I've been curious and hopeful about this study involving randomly chosen Canadians since it was announced. Much is made of the random picking of Canadian's to participate. The reported evidence suggests the process of choosing participants was far from random. Worse still, the process is not transparent as detailed documentation is not made available.

Reviewing the Workbook

I'm still left with little idea why the participants were so angry with governments and the nuclear industry. The dialogue process outlined in Backgrounder # 2 indicates that the participants received a letter with background information on used fuel and the role of NWMO. Did that make them angry? Maybe, but again the information the participants were exposed to is apparently not made available to the public. On the morning of the workshop they were provided with and taken through a workbook which was the basis for a presentation and were shown a short video. Those are available to the public on the CPRN and NWMO websites, respectively. I will check them out. Oops! The video on the NWMO website is a post dialogue report and not the one shown to participants.

The workbook is available on the CPRN website. It seems to be in the form of 43 overheads as the basis for presentation by a facilitator. Aside from a couple of

unqualified and rather dramatic phrases such as “remains dangerous for tens of thousands of years” and “could cause serious illness to all living organisms” the document seems an unemotional description of the problem at hand. It does not provide a basis for substantial anger. Perhaps the full report will bring out the reasons for the participants anger with governments and the nuclear industry.

Digging into the full report

The full report of some 75 pages repeats the executive summary and much of the information in the Backgrounders. I’m still looking for the reason participants had come to the sessions angry and frustrated. I hunted through the main report for more background on that.

I searched for “angry”, “angered” and “anger”. Surprisingly the words appear only a couple of times in the executive summary and the closing chapter. “Frustrated”, “frustrate” and “frustration” are used just three times including a repetition in the executive summary.

The executive summary alleges participants were “surprised and upset that the decision to use nuclear fuel was made 30 or more years ago without a plan”. A search reveals that one participant said *“I think one of the most surprising things that I’ve learned today is that they built these nuclear reactors and had no real definitive plan on what to do with the waste and 30 years later, we’re trying to decide.”* I have not come across a statement there was no forward planning for used fuel by the nuclear pioneers in the background information available. That message must have come from unavailable background information, the facilitators, or other participants and may confirm my impression participants were overly led.

Finally, Appendix VIII confirms that participants were told that the decision was made 30 years ago to use nuclear power without a long term plan for waste during the sessions. Polls of participants before and after the sessions show that comment only in the closing polls.

Searching on variations of the word adapt shows they are used 20 times in connection with developing new knowledge and “continuous improvement. My initial feeling that the modern management language of the facilitators is being attributed to the participants is reinforced.

Continuous improvement and adaptive management are perfectly fine concepts. However, to suggest that these concepts were not known and followed by nuclear energy pioneers has to be extremely insulting to them. I suspect that, given more time, the participants would come to understand that our nuclear pioneers were well aware of concepts of continuous improvement and adaptive management, if not the terminology. The reactors were built quite deliberately with full knowledge of the need to develop more knowledge and, in time, more definitive plans for the ultimate disposition of used fuel. It is surprising that the nuclear pioneers are castigated for applying the principles of

continuous improvement and adaptive management while those same principles are ultimately adopted and promoted heavily within the report.

On completing my review, I'm still not sure if the participants were led by the process to come in anger. Some of the background documents they were provided with, and certainly the oral presentations from facilitators, are simply not available to the public.

In the end, the citizens seemed to have contributed substantially and revealingly to the discussion, in spite of having only one day to pick up specialized information on the issue at hand. The Table from Chapter V seems a nice summary of their detailed contributions.

Citizens' Guiding Values

Responsibilities Across Generations:

- 1. Responsibility** - we need to live up to our responsibilities and deal with the problems we create
- 2. Adaptability** - continuous improvement based on new knowledge
- 3. Stewardship** - we have a duty to use all resources with care and to leave a sound legacy for future generations

Ensuring Confidence and Trust:

- 4. Accountability and Transparency** - to rebuild trust
- 5. Knowledge** - a public good for better decisions now and in the future
- 6. Inclusion** - the best decisions reflect broad engagement and many perspectives; we all have a role to play

Some of the points they made, such as the emphasis on improving efficiency and conservation to reduce the problem seem a little naïve. Those opinions probably reflect the continuing education they are receiving through the media and other means. I find their insistence on dialogue and an open transparent process interesting, given the lack of transparency evident in this report series relative to the process used for their selection and background preparation.

One statement made twice, "Citizens know that current patterns of energy consumption are not sustainable", indicates clear bias on the part of the report authors, likely stemming from the dogmatic mantra propagated by environmental organizations. A minority of participants came to the sessions (Appendix VIII) indicating a preference for "alternate" and "renewable energy". It is clear from the context that these participants and the authors of the report do not consider nuclear energy to be sustainable or renewable. That is not a closed issue. These concepts are somewhat vaguely defined and continue to be developed. In fact, the nuclear industry is willing to demonstrate that nuclear energy satisfies the criteria of sustainability and renewability. Additional information on the

sustainability of nuclear energy is available at the Canadian Nuclear Association website (<http://www.cna.ca/english/files/Climate%20Change/globalwarming.pdf>). A recent submission to President Bush from the American Nuclear Society discusses nuclear technology as a renewable source of energy. It is available at (<http://www.ans.org/pi/news/d-1109796745>). Frankly, sufficient renewable nuclear energy is available to allow current patterns of energy consumption to be not only sustained, but expanded. The intelligent use of energy is the key to boosting standards of living throughout the world. Perhaps many of the participants understand that.

Conclusions

There is much reference to the “random process” used to select 462 Canadians to participate in the process. The documentation indicates that 9686 Canadians were questioned. Fewer than one in 20 of those questioned were chosen to participate in the discussion sessions. It seems apparent the final selection is not random. No documentation is provided to give the public an idea of the criteria for participant rejection and selection. The questionnaire and questioning process are not provided for public scrutiny. The results of the questioning process are not provided to the public. The selection process is far from the transparent ideal recommended by the participants themselves.

Nearly five hundred Canadians were selected from the general public and introduced to fundamental concepts relevant to the disposition of use nuclear fuel over the period of one day. They did provide input on basic values relevant to the way forward on used fuel.

There are many opinions expressed in the report that reflect a considerable degree of misunderstanding of energy and nuclear industry values as well as the history of nuclear energy development.

Recommendations, Questions, Suggestions

All of the missing information on the questioning and selection of participants noted should be posted on the NWMO website in the interest of transparently providing the public with information to better judge the claim that the 462 participants represent their values.

The selection and one day consultation with this group of Canadians must represent a considerable expense. It seems a shame to simply discard them after one use. Are there any thoughts to reuse and recycle them to improve their knowledge and seek more input from them? One possibility would be to engage them again to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input on issues where there seems to be misunderstanding. Following that they could review the final phase of the NWMO project for consistency with the basic values they provided.