
ABSTRACT

Nuclear Fuel Waste and Aboriginal Concerns, Canada's Nuclear Fuel Waste Management Concept Public Hearings: A Content Analysis

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There is considerable uncertainty about how the federal government will deal with future proceedings in the management of nuclear fuel waste in Canada. This thesis attempts to answer one question within the entire nuclear waste disposal dilemma. Which issues can we expect Aboriginal people to raise at the negotiating and decision-making tables during the next siting phase? It is the intention of this thesis to identify and predict the concerns of Aboriginal communities that will be raised during future interaction and deliberations.

Using a content analysis approach, this study examines the entire record of public submissions and transcripts that were made during the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel (FEARP) scoping hearings and the public review of the Atomic Energy Council Limited's (AECL) environmental impact statement on the concept of geological disposal. Attention has been paid to native messages versus non-native messages that were raised during these hearings in order to obtain both a quantitative and qualitative understanding of what native peoples' perceptions and concerns are on the siting of nuclear fuel waste and whether there is a distinct difference to non-native perceptions. A method that involves a content analysis approach, coupled with a qualitative examination of the data, is employed in order to obtain a set of results that can be viewed with a certain degree of validity. Merely using a qualitative approach

which has been done in the past, although useful, unfortunately does not always hold the same weight on its own as rational, quantitative results usually do.

The Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel, also known as the Seaborn panel, clearly recommended that Aboriginal communities be involved in future management efforts, as they will undoubtedly be the population most affected by this project. The document conveying the Government's response to the Panel's final report affirmed this recommendation by committing the Government to initiating a dialogue with Aboriginal communities, where "the objective of the dialogue is to determine how Aboriginal People want to be consulted in the process leading up to the preferred approach for the long-term management of nuclear fuel waste" (Government of Canada, 1998). Given that Aboriginal communities will likely be most affected, due to the favourable geological siting characteristics found on traditional lands, it is logical to assume that their views on this matter will play a significant role in the decision. Therefore, issues and values that native people will raise must be addressed in any decision making process. The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), an organization recently appointed by the federal government, formed and funded by the nuclear energy industries (Ontario Power Generation, New Brunswick Power, Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. and Hydro-Quebec) is now responsible for "[proposing] to the government of Canada approaches for the management of nuclear fuel waste and

[implementing] the approach that is selected” (Nuclear Fuel Waste Act, 2002: 2).

It is increasingly being recognized that there is distinct value in incorporating the views of aboriginal people in environmental management strategies, as many new pieces of federal legislation have made explicit reference to the role that this culture should play (Nuclear Fuel Waste Act, 2002; Species at Risk Act, 2002). The objective of this research is to provide evidence of the intensity and the continued values and concerns that have remained constant within the nuclear waste management dilemma, as well as in other circumstances where Aboriginals have been faced with having to deal with the siting of a nuclear related facility. Recognition of these persistent values and concerns is important in the decisions we make about the environment, because in the words of Jeanette Wolfley, a member of the Shoeshone-Bannock tribe of Fort Hall Indian Reservation in Nevada:

“Cultural values and diversity are as urgent as biological diversity and must be manifested in scientific methods of valuing lands, resources, ecosystems, and human rights, or cultural knowledge must be considered equally in evaluating and planning for future projects or activities impacting tribal rights and resources” (Wolfley, 1998: 153)

Although the goal of this thesis is to identify these important issues, it is not intended to provide a guideline to these issues that will replace future and direct consultation in future facility siting attempts. The success of facility siting is likely to depend on an open and transparent process involving equal participation by all who are affected.

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