



NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION DES DÉCHETS NUCLÉAIRES

The Redevelopment Process for the NWMO Elders Forum



Early in our work the NWMO reached out to Aboriginal people, organizations and communities to better understand Aboriginal cultures and how to build relationships with Aboriginal peoples. A number of Aboriginal organizations were invited to recommend two Elders to sit on an NWMO group that would provide wisdom and advice in engaging with Aboriginal peoples. Each Elder was invited to bring a young person with them to meetings.

The NWMO Elders Forum was formed in 2005 and has met one or two times each year since then. The Elders Forum was made up of First Nation, Métis and Inuit members, - bringing with them a broad range of interests such as Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, political affairs, community development, health and welfare, Aboriginal communications, cultural life of community and relationships, community protocols, treaty rights, historical relationships, safety and youth interests.

The Elders Forum enabled Elders and youth to exchange and learn from one another and provided the opportunity to focus on Aboriginal and treaty rights and the safety of the deep geological repository.

The Elders Forum subsequently established a working group called Niigani, in which the name and logo or symbol for the group was determined through traditional ceremony. The logo shows seven geese flying in formation and the name Niigani means "leading the way." The Elders Forum and Niigani have provided valuable assistance to NWMO over the past six years.

In 2010, Elders identified the need to enhance the operation of the Elders Forum. The Elders made a number of suggestions, and a working group of Elders was established to further develop these suggestions. Both NWMO management and the NWMO's Advisory Council agreed that there was a need to consider changes. The NWMO was mindful of the need for a process that is broad and seeks the input from many organizations, communities and individuals. We were told that the process by which changes are made is as important as the changes themselves.

A discussion paper was issued for review and to seek input from a number of interested organizations and people. Following a period of review and input, NWMO management brought forward a specific proposal to the NWMO Board of Directors in December 2011.

- » A discussion paper entitled "Proposal for the Re-development of the NWMO Elders Forum" was developed and discussed at the July 2011 Elders Forum; NWMO discussed with the Elders Forum that in addition to meeting with the Elders Forum it would do additional research and would be meeting with key partners to gain insights regarding the matters that are subject of the redevelopment including, best practices.

- » Discussions took place with NWMO staff, NWMO Advisory Council members and with representatives from seven national Aboriginal organizations and institutions. The NWMO also met with representatives of Regional or Provincial Aboriginal Organizations and corporations that do a great deal of work with Aboriginal people. A number of common recommendations emerged from the meetings, these include:
 - Roles needs to be clarified including the role of the Forum itself
 - Appointment process: Elder representation needs to be balanced in terms of gender and national vs. regional areas of expertise;
 - Size of the group is an important consideration and a smaller group is recommended;
 - Term limits are needed; Appointments should be determined with input from National and Regional Aboriginal organizations
 - Youth participation: Youth participation is needed although it is recognized that determining how to do youth participation is a complex
 - Ceremonies are recommended;
 - Adequate funding for the meetings and activities of the Elders Forum is important;

- » In the July 2011 Elders Forum meeting, Elders wrestled with a number of tough questions. Progress was made on a number of issues including:
 1. Elders Forum participants felt there was no longer a need for a smaller working group and that the Elders Forum as a whole should be called Niigani and that they should meet more than once a year;
 2. Clarity on participant roles or a terms of reference was needed;
 3. The Elders Forum needs to remain National and may require additional members; and
 4. Greater attention needs to be paid to Elders Forum youth members and their potential contributions;

- » At the November 2011 Elders Forum meeting a draft Terms of Reference reflective of the advice and guidance received was presented. After the meeting a number of Elders either wrote or called the NWMO with further advice on restructuring the Elders Forum.

- » Based on the advice of Elders Forum members and advice gathered earlier, the amended draft Terms of Reference was presented to the NWMO Advisory Council and the NWMO Board of Directors. It was recommended that the Terms of Reference be circulated to Elders and Aboriginal organizations for final input.

The Elders Forum came to an end at December 31, 2011 and in January 2012 the NWMO began the process of selecting a Council of Elders that will act as advisors to NWMO management. The NWMO was pleased to receive expressions of interest from many Elders, many of who served on the Elders Forum, as well as nominations from many Aboriginal organizations.

The NWMO is deeply grateful to the many Elders who have worked with us over the years. Some of the Elders have passed on and some have become unable to travel, but we will honor all of the Elders who have worked with us at the first meeting of the Council of Elders in May 2012.

The NWMO and our entire country have benefited from the Elder's wise counsel. The issues we are working on are very difficult; the courage and leadership displayed by so many Elders willing to tackle these issues has been and will continue to be both humbling and inspirational to us all.