

# Our Mother, The Earth: the Role of Aboriginal Women in Environmental Issues and Challenges

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**nwmo**

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***OUR MOTHER, THE EARTH: the Role of Aboriginal Women in  
Environmental Issues and Challenges***

Discussion Paper prepared for the Native Women's Association of Canada in reference  
to Nuclear Waste Management

By Mary Jamieson, Native Management Services

April 2, 2009

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## 1.0 Background

In the spring of 2008, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) provided resources to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) to assist NWAC in developing ways and means of engaging Aboriginal women at the community in the discussion on the disposal of nuclear waste. While four provinces are known as "nuclear provinces" namely, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick (as generators of the waste) and Saskatchewan (as the supplier of uranium), it was decided that all of NWAC's PTMAs should be involved in the discussion for a number of reasons.

First, other provinces such as Manitoba could be potentially impacted by the transportation of nuclear waste or Nova Scotia could be impacted because the women see themselves as members of nations which transcend provincial lines. (ie Micmac or Mailiseet) who occupy both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and therefore would be impacted regardless of residency. In fact, in keeping with this view, women also stand firm on the requirement that each First Nations should be consulted based on their traditional protocols of what is meant by consultation and meaningful engagement.

Second, the disposal of high level nuclear waste under the earth's surface is viewed as an assault on "our mother" no matter how far away Aboriginal women may be from the site.

Third, Aboriginal women expressed particular concern for the potential of water contamination as a result of burying the waste. While the NWMO gave assurances that the waste would be buried in "water tight containers" and surrounded by a waterproofing clay material (bentonite) the women are not convinced that the life giving blood of our mother, water, will be protected.

Fourth, the nuclear waste disposal issue can focus the efforts of Aboriginal when addressing other environmental issues and challenges by developing ways to become involved and stay involved.

In July, 2008 NWAC hosted an Environmental Roundtable in Halifax and invited Aboriginal women from across Canada and representatives from the NWMO to discuss key issues related to engaging Aboriginal women and sustaining their involvement in this and other environmental challenges. The discussion made it clear that women hold a unique perspective on "our mother" and fear for her future and the lives she sustains. The women do not view the earth as something to be exploited for the convenience of people or for the creation of wealth but protected and nurtured so that she can keep on sustaining the future generations. This being said, most of the women agreed that it is not simply good enough to

bury their heads in the sand. There is a problem...the waste is here and Aboriginal women are being asked to help find a solution.

Because each nation has their own ways of being and understanding, it was decided to develop a tool kit that could be adapted to the needs of Aboriginal women at the community level with relative ease. The women also made it clear that one nation should not impose their views on another. In other words, there must be demonstrated respect for the jurisdiction of each nation.

The tool kit should be used to get women involved at many levels in understanding and addressing environmental issues while respecting the unique needs experienced by women at the community level. Because many of the women who participated at the Roundtable said they are often silenced by their elected Council when they try to become engaged in issues that are largely viewed as “technical”, the tool kit needed to provide as many technical, yet user-friendly resources as possible. This work was undertaken by graduate students at Dalhousie University with the guidance of NWAC.

In the fall of 2008, the NWAC Annual General Meeting was held in Ottawa with an environmental theme. The issue of nuclear waste and the NWMO’s partnership with NWAC was discussed. The women who attended the AGM said that this issue must include the voices of Aboriginal women and that at the very least, a ceremony should be developed or adapted when a site is found and the waste is buried.

In December, 2008, NWAC’s Environmental Roundtable met again in Halifax and stated that Aboriginal women must play a role in the management of nuclear waste and that assurances must be provided by the NWMO so that their role is vital:

- Aboriginal women should lead the community in issues that impact the natural environment because the health of women and their children (born and unborn) are often the most negatively impacted by large scale development projects including the massive scale proposed for the disposal of nuclear waste.
- Aboriginal women want written assurances from the NWMO that their voices will not only be heard during the “siting process” but given serious consideration and that a referendum or Band Council Resolution will not be enough to demonstrate “community willingness” to accept the nuclear waste management project.
- Aboriginal women require that a gender based analysis be undertaken by \*Aboriginal women at each step of the consultation process including development of the Terms of Reference, assessment of impacts, questions to be addressed during the consultation, assessment of potential/possible infringement on rights and, the accommodation stage.
- Aboriginal women want the NWMO to develop a protocol agreement with the willing host community that will ensure perpetual controls, monitoring and transportation safety to the site.
- Aboriginal women require an independent assessment of the advice and guidance provided by the NWMO and require an open and transparent third party review process of the site selection criteria.
- Aboriginal women require that they are involved in the development of a conflict resolution mechanism to be used throughout the nuclear waste management process.

- Aboriginal women would consider being involved in drafting “plain English” descriptions of relevant processes, concepts and terms related to nuclear waste management.

\*Aboriginal women means an appropriate Aboriginal women’s organization, not female staffers of a male-dominated organization or even the NWMO.

## 2.0 Role of Aboriginal Women in the Natural Environment Past and Present:

Aboriginal women and indeed, indigenous women from around the world have always had a unique relationship with, Our Mother, the earth. Women’s bodies are uniquely impacted by the phases of the moon just as the tidal waters are equally affected. Women provide the first environment for all human beings in the womb and provide sustenance to newborns just as the earth sustains all living beings so that they can thrive in this environment.

Aboriginal women were once at the centre of the use and management of natural resources because their roles demanded that they protect and sustain their families over seven generations. Aboriginal women acted as educators with respect to the environment so that those who came after them would carry out the important “laws” governing the natural balance between the needs of humans and the protection of all that sustained them. These” laws” included a reciprocal relationship with Our Mother, the Earth in that as human beings we are *required* to give back anything that is taken. And indeed, when something is taken, a ceremony is required that reminds us of our duties and obligations to Our Mother. While Aboriginal women raised their children they were also required to plant and harvest the corn, gather the sap from trees, gather the berries and nuts that were abundant, pick the medicines and prepare them, collect the water, prepare the food, clothe the family and care for the elderly and disabled. All of these tasks were done with deep respect for Our Mother and always in ceremony. These roles continue to varying degrees across our Nations and form an integral part of the “indigenous world view”. All of these duties and responsibilities were and are carried out with a holistic approach so that balance is maintained and one task does not take priority over another but all are equally valued. Aboriginal women hold much of the “traditional knowledge” that directs practices and activities with respect to the health of people and the natural environment. An understanding of this knowledge is critical in any process that impacts people or the natural environment and full engagement of Aboriginal women is necessary if this knowledge is to be gained.

The impact of the Indian Act and the Residential School experience (among other assaults on Aboriginal values and culture) diminished the important role of Aboriginal women as protectors of Our Mother and the environment has suffered. Sustainable development has been replaced with large scale developments that pollute the life blood of our mother - the water, the air and leave the earth scorched for the benefit of the wealthy and in the name of progress. The health of women and girls are the most likely to be negatively impacted by the pollution that is always present , another indication that women are closely linked to Our Mother, the earth. The reproductive health of women and particularly indigenous and Aboriginal women is at risk largely because their bodies are already under assault as a



result of poverty, poor housing, poor nutrition and the fact that they are often seasonal labourers who are exposed to pesticides and other pollutants.

“We are seeing increased rates of endometriosis as a result of exposure to dioxins, toxic chemical compounds produced by various industrial processes. According to Dr. Elizabeth Lee Vliet, who runs a holistic women's health practice, women are increasingly being diagnosed with early menopause, early onset of menses, delayed menses, and increased miscarriages. They are also giving birth more and more to children born with severe physical deformities. We are also seeing more women with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), the most common cause of female infertility.” ( Reproductive Justice and Gender Misdiagnosis: Reproductive Health and Our Environment, Mariana Ruiz Firmat , April 2008 )

Even though this information is widely known, policies with respect to the natural environment rarely reflect the need to protect the reproductive health of women.

Now Our Mother and all of her interconnected ecosystems are facing the greatest threat of all. The threat caused by global warming. But there are other dangers that must be addressed including, what to do with the high level nuclear waste that continues to accumulate while more and more electricity is demanded and generated.

In Aboriginal communities, decision-making does not often involve the views of women unless they happen to be elected officials. Matriarchal societies have been replaced by a foreign system although there are positive signs that this is changing. Women are often involved in issues related to health, education and social challenges but are rarely heard on economic development or issues that impact long term community planning. Very few Aboriginal women have studied the sciences, business or resource management. But Aboriginal women still maintain their innate relationship with the land and the environment. Aboriginal women are the “keepers of the culture” and the protectors of indigenous/traditional knowledge within most of our Nations. They are also educators of children and youth and as such must play a critical role in protecting Our Mother while building a better quality of life for our families, our communities and our Nations.

In terms of the disposal of high level nuclear waste, Aboriginal women were at first very reluctant to get involved in the discussion and many still remain reticent and sceptical. These feelings are understandable given historical relationships with non-Aboriginal governments and industries. However, a significant number of Aboriginal women in leadership roles have stated that “the waste is here, it will remain lethal for generations to come and it is our responsibility, indeed our duty to utilize our knowledge and our special relationship with Our Mother to ensure that she is protected and that the well being of our children and future generations is protected as well.” However, Aboriginal women want assurances that the NWMO acts in good faith before they agree to help.

### 3.0 Exercising Our Rights and Responsibilities as Aboriginal Women.

When it comes to development in many First Nations communities, Aboriginal women and their traditional role as stewards of the natural environment are often not respected in favour of money generation opportunities. For example, a group of Aboriginal women organized themselves to take action when the Meadow Lake Tribal Council was considering offering lands to AECL to build a high level nuclear waste site in their territories. This “bid” was offered without consultation with the women and the local communities. As a result, the Indigenous Women’s Environmental Network was formed:

“The Indigenous Women's Environmental Network is an ad-hoc group of Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan who are concerned about environmental issues and the impact that megaprojects have on Indigenous people. We have been working for several years on issues such as uranium mining, clear cutting, and damming of river systems. We are also concerned with other issues that impact on the survival of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan.

The issue that is foremost in our minds at this point, and the main driving force behind wanting to organise Indigenous women in Saskatchewan, is the new threat to all our lives in the form of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council's proposal to build a permanent high level nuclear waste repository in northern Saskatchewan.” ([www. ncseonline.org/nae/docs/iwen.html](http://www.ncseonline.org/nae/docs/iwen.html))

The Aboriginal women who participated in the two Environmental Roundtables organized to focus on the nuclear waste issue expressed concern that what was attempted by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Saskatchewan might occur again particularly if Aboriginal people continue to struggle with poverty. The following strategies emerged from the discussions:

- Promote alternative forms of energy such as solar and wind.
- Develop principles that will guide the development of protocol agreements between First Nations and developers/governments
- Become more aware and knowledgeable about the issues that impact the natural environment including forestry, water contamination and diversion, mining, landfills, and other harmful and irreparable activities.
- Collaborate with other indigenous women to find ways to protect future generations from destructive assaults on the natural environment.
- Educate our children about the natural laws that ensure the survival of our mother and her children.
- Teach our children to respect the natural environment by sharing the indigenous and traditional knowledge that Aboriginal women hold.

The World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 (Women and the Environment) indicated the following:

“Through their management and use of natural resources, women provide sustenance to their families and communities. As consumers and producers, caretakers of their families and educators, women play an important role in promoting sustainable development through their concern for the quality and sustainability of life for present and future generations.” (Part K)

The objectives articulated by the Indigenous Women’s Environmental Network still remain important to Aboriginal women across Canada and in fact they go one step further and state that, “If Aboriginal people are being asked to help find a safe way to dispose of nuclear waste, assurances [a specific date] must be given of when Canada will stop producing waste by adopting alternative forms of power generation and that Canada will at no time import waste from other countries even those who purchase CANDU reactors from AECL.”

That being said, Aboriginal women want to be taken seriously and provided the respect they need to engage in the discussion regarding nuclear waste management as equal participants, just as they were in the past with respect to all matters impacting Our Mother. They need assurances that their voices will be heard and their words acted upon.

The Native Women’s Association of Canada feels so strongly about the role of Aboriginal women in environmental issues and in particular, nuclear waste management, that they are prepared to take the *lead* in terms of educating the people (particularly women because they educate others), developing draft protocol agreements for the consideration of impacted Nations and developing principles with respect to the environment for adaptation by specific Nations. The World Conference on Women held in Beijing, 1995 stated the following:

“Women have often played leadership roles or taken the lead in promoting an environmental ethic, reducing resource use, and reusing and recycling resources to minimize waste and excessive consumption. Women can have a particularly powerful role in influencing sustainable consumption decisions. In addition, women's contributions to environmental management, including through grass-roots and youth campaigns to protect the environment, have often taken place at the local level, where decentralized action on environmental issues is most needed and decisive. Women, especially indigenous women, have particular knowledge of ecological linkages and fragile ecosystem management. Women in many communities provide the main labour force for subsistence production, including production of seafood; hence, their role is crucial to the provision of food and nutrition, the enhancement of the subsistence and informal sectors and the preservation of the environment. In certain regions, women are generally the most stable members of the community, as men often pursue work in distant locations, leaving women to safeguard the natural environment and ensure adequate and sustainable resource allocation within the household and the community.”(Part K)

Aboriginal women have had success in raising awareness about environmental issues and in garnering the support of others in their cause. The “Water Walk” organized by Josephine Mandamin successfully drew attention to the plight of the polluted Great Lakes. The Water Walk involved raising awareness in both Canada and the United States and was carried out with little money.

“Two Anishinawbe Grandmothers, and a group of Anishinawbe Women and Men have taken action regarding the water issue by walking the perimeter of the Great Lakes.

Along with a group of Anishinabe-que and supports, they walked around Lake Superior in Spring 2003, around Lake Michigan in 2004, Lake Huron in 2005, Lake Ontario in 2006 and Lake Erie in 2007. The 1st Annual Women's Water Walk took place April 2003. Several women from different clans came together to raise awareness that our clean and clear water is being polluted by chemicals, vehicle emissions, motor boats, sewage disposal, agricultural pollution, leaking landfill sites, and residential usage is taking a toll on our water quality. Water is precious and sacred...it is one of the basic elements needed for all life to exist.

The Annual Women's Water Walk was chosen for Spring because for the natural re-growth of our natural habitat, as it is a in time for renewal, re-growth, and re-birth."  
([www.motherearthwaterwalk.com](http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com))

The Water Walk was so successful in raising awareness and educating people about the importance of protecting the natural environment that NWAC has established and the Aboriginal Women's Environmental Network plan to co-host a national version of the Water Walk that focused on the Great Lakes.

Aboriginal women are best suited to take a leadership role on environmental issues and challenges but the demonstrated support of our communities is needed and agreements should be reached so that this important work is not undermined but rather championed by Aboriginal leadership.

In October, 2008 the Native Women's Association of Canada participated in a dialogue with other groups including the AFN, Niigani (NWMO Elders Group), the Canadian Association of Municipalities, Sierra Club of Canada and others. The purpose of the dialogue was to engage in a discussion on the process to be used to select a site for a nuclear waste repository. The Dialogue session touched on the concerns of Aboriginal people:

"Some participants proposed that two parallel engagement processes are required: one for Aboriginal people, and one for non-Aboriginal Canadians. These participants noted that the site selection process should incorporate the duty to consult with Aboriginal peoples. Additionally, it was suggested that the process needs to go beyond the regulatory duty to consult, to a more meaningful engagement and involvement of the Aboriginal community." P. 3 (NWMO-Stratos Multi-Party Dialogues, Ottawa, October 1, 2008)

This proposal is considered a step forward by NWAC especially with reference to the "duty to consult" and the preparations that NWAC is making to inform its membership through the introduction of the Tool Kit in Aboriginal communities.

In terms of key terms used in the Objectives developed by the NWMO for the siting process: "well being of the communities"; "environmental integrity, and fairness", NWAC feels very strongly that they should take a leadership role in defining what is meant by these terms from the perspective of Aboriginal women. Once defined, these terms should be articulated in a protocol agreement with NWMO so that Aboriginal communities have the assurance they require should they express an interest in hosting a site.

The Aboriginal women who attended the Environmental Round Table in Halifax in December, 2008 made it very clear that to ensure a fair process, an independent third party should be appointed to oversee the next steps of the NWMO and that a conflict resolution process should be put into place as a part of the siting process. Both of these requirements are mentioned in the report from the Dialogue session held in Ottawa last fall. NWAC has a leadership role to play in defining both of these mechanisms.

Finally, NWAC has a role to play in developing a communication strategy with Aboriginal communities. The Dialogue report notes that print materials and web blogging as a way to share information with Aboriginal people may not go far enough. Instead a more one on one strategy is recommended that will build greater understanding and address some of the fears that have been expressed.

#### 4.0 Strategies

4.1 Garner support for NWAC's Environmental Leadership role from other national Aboriginal political organizations. (There is a precedent for this. In the case of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), the Assembly of First Nations signed an MOU with CAAN endorsing them as the spokespeople on HIV/AIDS for First Nations.)

This will facilitate:

- Participation of Aboriginal women in all levels of decision-making
- More user friendly access to information related to environmental issues and particularly issues respecting siting of a nuclear waste repository
- A gender perspective in the definition, design and implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms
- Integration of women's traditional knowledge and practices into environmental management programs with a focus on nuclear waste management
- More Aboriginal women pursuing science and technology degrees
- Reduction of risks to women's health as a result of large scale development projects

4.2 Community Engagement includes education of Aboriginal women and youth in environmental issues including nuclear waste management. There are many strategies and ideas in the "Tool Kit" developed as a part of this project that should be utilized. This report does not go into detail about these but rather refers readers to the "Tool Kit". Other strategies include:

- Secure funding to support "Train the Trainer" programs so that the tool kit can be widely utilized.
- Taking a leadership role in "cleaning-up" Aboriginal communities including advocating for removal of debris and unwanted items, recycling programs, reuse as often as possible and education campaigns in the schools. Aboriginal women need to "walk the talk" and set an example for reducing the use and dependence on energy.
- Help to raise awareness of youth and other Aboriginal women about the value of Our Mother and work to design community based environmental protection programs and policies.

- Assist community based education and engagement initiatives to support and encourage full and effective participation of Aboriginal women and Aboriginal peoples in the NWMO processes.

4.3 Demonstrate Leadership so that Aboriginal women become vital in environmental Challenges including the siting process regarding nuclear waste management:

- Organize “think tanks” to develop the principles and draft protocol agreements that Aboriginal communities can adapt when dealing with governments and industry to set parameters for development/siting of projects with particular effort related to nuclear waste management.
- Engage in zero waste events including at NWAC’s AGA and other meetings where Aboriginal women gather. Encourage others to do the same.
- Provide an annual scholarship and honouring ceremony for Aboriginal women who pursue environmental studies.
- Speak to Aboriginal youth about the importance of traditional medicines and practices with a view to restoring respect and pride for Our Mother and all that she provides.
- Restore and promote the environmental laws that once guided the actions of Aboriginal people including ceremonies and practices that reminded people of their responsibilities toward Our Mother.

3.4 Set measures to ensure that progress is made including dates and deadlines for action.

## APPENDIX A

### NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA- Environmental Roundtable

Marriot Hotel, Halifax Nova Scotia July 7-8, 2008

### **“Empowering Aboriginal Women to regain their respected role as Stewards and Protectors of our Environment in the Context of Nuclear Waste Management”**

#### List of Participants

Sarah Francis (Elder) Nova Scotia  
Donna Augustine New Brunswick  
Dee Campbell Nova Scotia  
Judy Hughes Saskatchewan  
Mary Jane Peters New Brunswick  
Dorothy George NFLD  
Susie McPherson Manitoba  
Patty Doyle- Bedwell Nova Scotia  
Cheryl Maloney NWAC  
Ramona Bird Billy Manitoba  
Kathy Bird Manitoba  
Priscilla Settee Saskatchewan  
Jeanette Corbierre Laval Ontario  
Kara Paul Nova Scotia  
Kim Paul Nova Scotia  
Diana Campbell Nova Scotia  
Dr. Anda Kalvins NWMO  
Kari-Dawn Wuttunee Saskatchewan  
Linda Maloney Nova Scotia  
Grace Francis Nova Scotia  
Pat Patton NWMO  
Melissa Cooper Ontario  
Hilary Maloney-Nevin Nova Scotia  
Mary Jamieson (Facilitator) Ontario  
(Please see attached Appendix A for contact information)

#### Day One- July 7

The meeting was opened by Elder, Sarah Francis where she offered encouraging remarks and a prayer.

### Opening Remarks

Cheryl Maloney, NWAC provided background for the meeting noting that the Nuclear Waste Management Organization provided funds to NWAC to advise the organization on how best to engage Aboriginal women in the discussion related to the safe management and potential disposal of nuclear waste.

### Roundtable Introductions

Facilitator, Mary Jamieson asked all participants to introduce themselves and identify who they represent. She also asked that participants express their expectations for the meeting. Many expressed fears about the process as follows:

- Why should we become involved now, after the fact?
- This stuff is deadly, the nuclear industry is not transparent and is only involving us now to appease us.
- Why do they keep using nuclear generated power, we should be using alternative forms of energy (need to influence energy policy in Canada)?
- We're worried that they will use our people by offering economic benefits.
- How were elders selected to advise NWMO?
- Don't want to be involved in this, it looks like I'm endorsing the plans of the NWMO.
- How do we expect the NWMO to be accountable to us if we are not involved?

There were also comments/questions regarding the importation of nuclear waste from other countries and the current Government Energy Policy that relies heavily on Nuclear Power rather than investing in other forms of power generation( solar, wind etc).

Mary Jamieson, Facilitator reminded participants that the ultimate goal of the roundtable is to design a *tool* to be used at all levels to engage Aboriginal women in environmental issues including (but not limited to) the management of Canada's nuclear fuel waste.

### The Environment and Aboriginal People

Donna Augustine, member of the NWMO Elders Advisory Group noted that there are Aboriginal prophecies about the environment that must be respected. She also said that Aboriginal women must take a leadership role in the protection and stewardship of the environment for the sake of generations to come. Currently, plants and medicines are facing destruction due to large scale projects and the deterioration of the environment generally. It is the role of Aboriginal women to find a safe way forward.

### Nuclear Waste Management

Pat Patton and Dr. Anda Kalvins (NWMO) provided a visual presentation on *Implementing Adaptive Phased Management* of Nuclear Waste which is an approach that addresses the long-term care of Canada's nuclear fuel that is, "**socially acceptable, technically sound, environmentally responsible and economically feasible.**"

Deep geological disposal is being studied as the way to manage the waste over the long term.



Over the next Five years NWMO will continue its on-going work with Aboriginal peoples (as key stakeholders in the process) through:

- Working with Niigani (Aboriginal Working Group formed through the 2006 Elders Forum that provides on-going advice and guidance to NWMO and assists with building relationships with Aboriginal groups in the 4 nuclear provinces (Ont, NB, QUE, Sask.)
- Renewal and expansion of contacts with national, provincial and regional Aboriginal groups.
- Developing protocols with Aboriginal organizations
- Developing culturally appropriate communication materials
- Developing cross-cultural understanding interweaving traditional knowledge and culture with western science
- Conducting a summer youth project 2008
- Developing a NWMO Aboriginal policy.

It was noted that 2500 Aboriginal people have had input into the discussion to date.

### Brainstorming Session #1:

#### Stewardship Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women with respect to Nuclear Waste

- Realize that we are the keepers of traditional knowledge
- Promote sustainable development
- Ask questions and educate ourselves about the issues
- Walk the talk, demonstrate concern for the environment (conservation) They are building more reactors because we continue to use more energy.
- Advocate for and promote power generation alternatives
- Educate women and youth
- Provide scholarships for our young women to become scientists
- Practicing our responsibilities by protecting the water, the plants and the medicines
- Understand the depth of opposition to the nuclear cycle that all indigenous women share/engage with women around the world
- Demand transparency from the nuclear industry
- Need to develop a Communications Plan
- Resources should be provided to engage women at the local and regional levels
- Influence the major corporations and those on the Board of the NWMO
- Our reports should be appended to reports circulated by governments and the NWMO
- Aboriginal people need "regulatory authority"
- Look at lessons learned from other environmental assessments.'

### Brainstorming Session #2:

#### Challenges Aboriginal Women face when they attempt to have a voice in environmental issues

- Poverty
- Multi-tasking
- Lack of resources to engage other women
- Racism/Sexism
- Backlash in the community/Intimidation

- Lack of information/need to be educated on the subject
- Power structure in the community is controlled by men
- Need to build relationships with those in power positions ie Chiefs
- Need to be involved at higher levels ie Boards

### Brainstorming Session #3:

#### Challenges Aboriginal Women face when they attempt to *sustain their involvement* in environmental issues

- Competing issues for valuable time
- Socio/economic realities in our communities faced everyday
- Staying connected and informed
- Self-worth (Having to do everything for nothing)
- Having a game plan with attached reasonable resources

### Day 2 -July 8

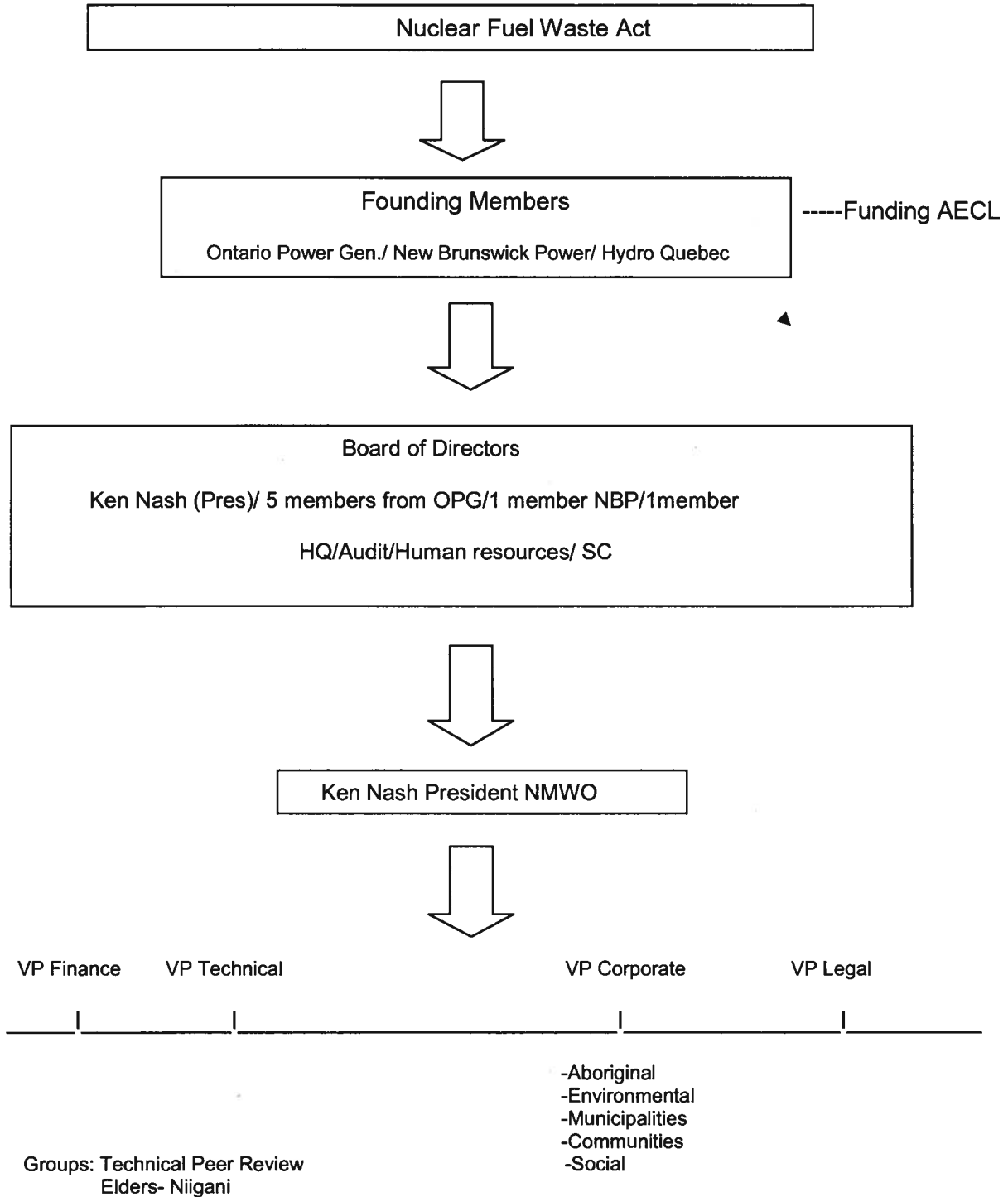
The meeting was opened by Elder, Sarah Francis where she offered encouraging remarks and a prayer.

### Roundtable Remarks

Facilitator, Mary Jamieson asked the participants to express concerns they may have had overnight. The following resulted:

- Concerned about our young people and how we can get them ready so they don't react with violence
- We need our youth to become scientists
- Concerned about traditional knowledge and the possibility that we are simply being used as tokens
- I want to move forward and network to determine what can be done beyond the mandate of this group
- Need to work with others including the NWMO
- There are two sides- Environmental and Economic we need a balance for the sake of the next 7 generations
- Do we want input on site selection?
- What about transporting waste? We need to look at territories not provinces ie Micmac Territory vs NS or NB.
- Need to reconnect with a different thinking process, self-control, intuition, empathy, ability to weigh options, emotional memory.
- We need to educate ourselves so we can play on a level playing field
- We need to be able to use our own language and terminology in a "tool kit" so that our women get the best benefit from it
- NWAC needs to discuss this issue further as a Board.

The NWMO agreed to provide an organizational overview of the Organization as follows:



## Brainstorming Session #4:

### How Can Aboriginal Women Be Effective in Environmental Issues?

#### Building Relationships:

Build Relationships with Aboriginal Leadership by stating that “Aboriginal women want to resume their traditional roles as protectors of the environment, will the Chiefs and other leaders support this effort within our nations?”

Build Relationships with provinces, industry, the research community and Aboriginal communities.

Build Relationships with Civil Society Voices, youth, environmentalists and others.

#### Be Informed:

About Aboriginal and Treaty Rights and Compensation.

About our traditional roles and responsibilities regarding children, future generations and the environment.

#### Sustained Resources:

From diverse sources.

#### Address Jurisdictional Issues

So that we are respectful of everyone’s roles.

#### The Tool Kit should include:

- Definitions of the roles of Aboriginal women based on history
- Statements of how Aboriginal can work with and support the community and do the work on behalf of the community
- Templates for letter writing, engaging leadership, interfacing with health care providers, business, government etc.

#### NEXT STEPS:

- Write Roundtable Draft Report and circulate for further input
- Define a plan
- NWAC’s Board needs to discuss the issue further so that there is full understanding of what is needed.
- Include on NWAC’s Environmental discussion board on the website
- Include in Aboriginal women’s resource guide
- Share information on nuclear waste in communities

- Begin to develop the Tool kit with, Assertion of rights, dispute resolution techniques, roles and responsibilities of women within each nation, advocacy methods, letter writing templates, International Declaration of Rights and Intellectual Property
- PTMAs should educate their membership
- Develop principles re: the environment “No more waste to be produced”
- Establish a working group
- Keep NWMO informed (reciprocal relationship)
- Change the workshop title to “Issues and Concerns” rather than Management
- Seek funds from SHERC and CIHR
- Projects can be funded through NWAC’s Environmental Network link with Paddy and Priscilla as academics.
- NWMO will likely fund a follow-up gathering in early December to review and rebuild the toolkit.
- Consultation Process “Do a gender-based analysis”

Closing: Elder Sarah Francis closed the roundtable with a prayer and noted that the meeting had been very productive.

## APPENDIX B

Native Women's Association of Canada Annual General Assembly  
Ottawa ON , October 5, 2008  
Input from AGA on Nuclear Waste Presentation

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A power point presentation similar to the one attached as APPENDIX C was presented to those assembled. In response, participants noted the following:

- Should look at International Models in terms of the importation of waste from 3<sup>rd</sup> parties
- Women's role from the teachings indicates that women have always been the keepers and protectors of the earth
- Women have to act now
- Need to reduce the amount of use of nuclear energy (NWAC should propose preventative actions)
- In terms of POTENTIAL Quebec site should consider neighbouring communities and well water safety issues
- Should look at inherent rights
- Women want assurances re: transportation safety, wildlife, human and water (Food security, water safety)
- Youth are concerned with ecosystems, medicines and migratory patterns of animal life

In terms of Site Selection:

- Document traditional use of the land, activities and locations from a women's perspective
- Develop cultural protocols (women) to include traditional use, value and significance
- Need proof (assurances) on specific impacts, tangible and intangible (Need a baseline study to measure the impacts)
- Develop an assessment process/social impact studies
- What is the definition of willing host community? (Referendums can be divisive)

Overall:

- Need to find a balance between economic benefits and environmental protection
- Need to form alliances with other First Nations who may be impacted
- In the Yukon Aboriginal decision making is accountable to youth and elders
- Because all of humanity will be impacted we need to form alliances with non-Aboriginal groups who are like minded.

Need to Develop a Statement of Principles:

- Women need to regain their role as advocates for the community and work with the youth
- Need to incorporate a spiritual, ceremonial component in this work
- Need to remind ourselves and others that we have a reciprocal relationship with the earth. We give back what was taken out.
- Protocols (see CIHR)
- Balance between environmental protection and economic well being (see Indigenous Environmental Network website)
- Walk the talk
- Be entrepreneurial in thinking green
- Advocate for green policies in our communities ie Band Council bldgs etc.
- Examine NWMO's definition of willing host community and suggest alternate wording to make our point

- **Need to define consultation from a traditional perspective and practice involving family/clans/kinship and other valued relationships.**

## APPENDIX D

### Notes from Environmental Roundtable- Native Women's Association of Canada –Halifax December 9/08

#### From Flipcharts:

- OCAP concept should be incorporated into the tool kit (Ownership, Control, Access and Protection)
- Aboriginal References should be used as sources
- Expression as Native Women/leaders, Look at Water and our leadership role
- State the role of Native Women at the beginning of the tool kit.
- Develop a protocol agreement with NWMO to include assurances, controls, monitoring, transportation
- What you take out-something needs to be put back/responsibility of women and elders
- Want an independent assessment of NWMO advice and guidance/Conflict resolution mechanism
- Should be informed about worst case scenarios ie. Earthquakes, meteorite strike, climate change
- Information is available on the NWMO website ie International organizations, companies etc
- NWMO has International Review Panel to peer review, research and advise on availability of research
- NWMO understands the need for information ie. Technical, complex/detailed and in plain English
- NWMO needs to know what information community's need ie how complex, how detailed
- There may be a way that NWMO involves an Aboriginal review of technical data and reports
- Funding will be available to do our own studies
- Youth-toolkit too comprehensive-too much
- Component approach rather than issue approach



- Need a youth cheat sheet- site map- a way to navigate in a way that youth can understand
- Open 3<sup>rd</sup> party review process of selection criteria
- No manipulation to make a willing community “fit” the criteria
- Plain English description of process, concepts, terms
- Elected officials don’t necessarily communicate to the community
- Don’t know if elected leadership has participated in decision –making
- More isolated your community the less you may be aware of decisions being made on your behalf
- Have a concern in N.B.- Micmac, Maliseet and Passamoquody Territory
- How is the role of Aboriginal women different from Aboriginal men? Women educate and inform
- Is there a site in mind in NB? –compensation package? Economic benefits?
- Community visioning fits here with the process
- Not a site in mind in NB
- Meadow Lake volunteered in the 1980s-had economic benefits on their minds
- Thinking about ways to get the tool kit into the communities
- AFN- how does their role fit with NWAC?
- Examine our role as Anishnawbekwek, we take a holistic approach and we need to push at the local level to make change. We need to look at alternative sources of energy
- Recognize those who protect the land it is our responsibility and our role must be stated clearly
- The Canadian public should be made aware of our perspectives
- Include tabs in the tool kit depending on the issue the user wants more info on.
- NWMO and AFN developing a protocol on engagement process for upcoming siting process( Afn has a role but will not be making any decisions for communities)
- How do I get involved and have influence on Energy Policy?