



Native Women's Association of Canada  
National consultation on  
Nuclear Fuel Waste Management

June 14, 2005

Ottawa, ON

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Native Women's Association of Canada held a one day national consultation on June 14, in Ottawa with invited Provincial/Territorial Member Associations, Youth Council Representatives and one interested woman from Attawapiskatt, Ontario. A total of sixteen women attended representing; New Brunswick, British Columbia, Yukon, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, PEI, Labrador, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and the National level.

The Workshop was facilitated by Mary Jamieson, President of Native Management Services and past member of the Seaborn Panel, on the Disposal of High Level Nuclear Waste. It was sponsored by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) as a part of their "dialogue process" with Aboriginal peoples. (see Appendix A for the Agenda)

The Workshop included a review of the input received to date from other Aboriginal groups including; the Assembly of First Nations, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association, Saskatchewan Métis Society, and others.

R. Anthony Hodge, NWMO reviewed the recommendation of the NWMO to the Government of Canada with the group and explained the steps undertaken to reflect the values and concerns of all Canadians. (see Appendix B)

He indicated that the recommendation of the NWMO will be forwarded to the Minister of Natural Resources on November 15, 2005 and that the Minister will want to hear from NWAC on the report and the recommendation. A decision from the Government is not expected for one or two years and the NWMO will use this time to continue the "dialogue with Canadians". While developing their recommendation, the NWMO involved 10,000 to 15,000 people and about 1,500 to 2,000 Aboriginal people.

Dr. Hodge noted that the process of involving people in every phase of the development of a recommendation is "pushing the public policy regime" and that the public must find the way in which Nuclear Fuel Waste is managed "acceptable" if further steps are to be taken. He also noted:

- The recommendation for an "Adaptive Phased Management Approach" will cost from \$20 Billion to \$25 Billion. (Currently \$1 Billion is held in trust for the project.
- Because 90% to 95% of the waste is in Ontario, this would be the most likely province to take on a site.

- There is some interest in Saskatchewan to accept the waste so they can “close the loop” on the nuclear energy cycle from Uranium mining to disposal of waste BUT it may be difficult to move it to Saskatchewan from Ontario.
- No siting process was required at this point.
- Safety and security for people and the environment are of paramount importance along with fairness.
- The Seaborn Report concluded that deep geological disposal of nuclear fuel waste in the Canadian Shield was “technically feasible” but that the concept was not acceptable to the public for a number of reasons.
- Since the release of the Seaborn Report, it has been discovered that the Ordovician sedimentary rock located primarily in Southern and Northern Ontario is a potential medium for disposal of the waste.
- The Seaborn Report recommended that a governing Board to manage the waste be independent of the producers but this was ignored and the resulting Board represents the nuclear industry or the “producers of the waste”. One Aboriginal member is on the Advisory Council.
- The Government also promised to undertake a review of Energy Policy that may have addressed the future of nuclear generated power but this was not acted upon.

Dr. Hodge said that the recommendation of the NWMO is a hybrid of three options, those being: leave the waste where it is (at the nuclear generating stations), centralized storage, either above or below ground and, deep geological disposal in the Canadian Shield (AECL Concept).

#### The NWMO Recommendation:

*“Our recommendation for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel waste in Canada has as its primary objectives – **safety** – the protection of humans and the environment – and **fairness** to this and future generations. Therefore we recommend to the Government of Canada **Adaptive Phased Management**, a risk management approach with the following characteristics:*

*\*Centralized containment and isolation of the used fuel in a deep geological repository in suitable rock formations, such as the crystalline rock of the Canadian Shield or Ordovician sedimentary rock;*

*\* Flexibility in the pace and manner of implementation through a phased decision-making process, supported by a program of continuous learning, research and development;*

*\* Provision for an interim step in the implementation process in the form of shallow underground storage of used fuel at a central site, prior to final placement in a deep repository;.*

*\*Continuous monitoring of the used fuel to support data collection and confirmation of the safety and performance of the repository;*

*\*Potential for retrievability of the used fuel for an extended period, until such time as a future society makes a determination on the final closure, and the appropriate form and duration of postclosure monitoring.*

Following Dr. Hodge's presentation, the workshop participants undertook to answer the questions posed by the NWMO as follows:

1. Is the recommended approach appropriate for Canada?
2. What are the conditions required to successfully implement the approach?
3. What special Aboriginal insights and /or concerns should be kept in mind by the NWMO as implementation proceeds?

(see Appendix C for Power Point Presentation prepared by Native Management Services)

## **1.0 NWAC RESPONSE**

Question # 1:

Is the recommended approach appropriate for Canada?

“No” the approach is not appropriate to Canada because:

- There is no awareness of what is being proposed in the Aboriginal communities that may be directly impacted by the recommendation.
- The risks far outweigh the benefits to a “remote” Aboriginal community that has not benefited from Nuclear Power.
- Transportation of the waste through or near Aboriginal communities to a central site poses unknown risks.
- The incorporation of traditional or indigenous knowledge of the land and its spiritual context are largely unknown in the non-Aboriginal community and may be ignored in favour of scientific findings and credentialism.
- There is no assurance that if a disposal site is found, that AECL will not import the waste produced by their CANDU reactors as a way to stimulate sales in foreign markets. (ie. Chemical leasing)
- The NWMO recommendation is based on existing waste and the waste projected to be produced by existing reactors but there is no assurance that the production of more and more nuclear waste will be curtailed in Canada any time soon.
- There is no discussion of the value of pursuing alternative, green power options while the 30 year “siting process” is underway.
- The NWMO membership is “suspect” because it is driven by the waste producers.

Question #2:

What are the conditions required to successfully implement the approach?

- A targeted date to curtail the use of nuclear power (and therefore, the production of more waste) in favour of alternative forms of energy with dedicated resources to design, develop and implement these sources.
- Greater transparency in the development of proposals to dispose of nuclear fuel waste demonstrated by legislation to prohibit the importation of foreign nuclear waste into Canada.
- A decision making framework that is driven by potentially impacted Aboriginal communities (ie. pace and manner).
- Definitions of “willing host community”, “risks”, “benefits”, “traditional/indigenous knowledge” etc. as articulated by potentially impacted Aboriginal communities.
- More public education and awareness of the problem across Canada and special efforts in potentially impacted Aboriginal communities, resourced

- by NWMO and delivered by Aboriginal women at the local and regional levels.
- Balanced incorporation of science and traditional/indigenous knowledge in finding a solution to the problem. In other words, the involvement of Aboriginal elders, healers and other respected people in the design of a solution rather than reacting to a proposal/recommendation.
  - Hands-on involvement of young people in finding a solution to the problem through sponsored think tanks, scholarships and international discussion groups.
  - Standards for safety and security for humans and the environment defined by Aboriginal people working with scientists of their choosing and resourced by NWMO.

Question # 3:

What special Aboriginal insights and /or concerns should be kept in mind by the NWMO as implementation proceeds?

First, it must be stated that the Native Women's Association of Canada does not support the implementation of the recommendation of the NWMO for the foregoing reasons. However, it is agreed that there is a potentially deadly problem to solve and NWAC is willing and in fact, eager to find a solution. The following **principles** must guide any further discussion:

1. Fairness that incorporates a "level playing field" as defined by the Aboriginal people who may be potentially impacted.
2. One-hundred percent control of the research methodology utilized in Aboriginal communities and territories that may be impacted.
3. Respect for the social structures, vulnerable languages and cultures, indigenous plants and medicines, hunting, fishing and trapping grounds, areas of spiritual significance as defined by potentially impacted Aboriginal communities.
4. Settlement of land claims, the use of Crown Land for subsistence pursuits, Aboriginal title etc before "siting" is initiated.
5. Demonstrated willingness of the NWMO to understand the unique spiritual connection of Aboriginal people to the environment and to utilize the understanding they gain to find a solution that benefits future generations. Commit to: "*Understanding now...mutual agreement and action that benefits all after the learning process.*"

## **2.0 Input of Other Aboriginal Groups**

Participants also reviewed the input of other Aboriginal groups and largely concurred with their concerns as follows:

1. **Respect:** It is important that we walk together in dignity and respect and finish what we started
2. **Responsibility:** We have responsibility for the future generations
  - We should take a proactive role in energy conservation
  - We must control, mitigate and minimize the long term effects that we are aware of
3. **Mistrust, Fear and Trust:**
  - Industry dominance on the NWMO Board is a conflict of interest
  - Economically depressed First nations may be targeted for disposal/storage
  - Mistrust of governments, its' institutions, its' promises, its' treaties
  - The North has experience with abandoned mines, persistent organic pollutants etc and no one is responding
4. **Traditional knowledge and wisdom** must be incorporated including:  
Process related insight (who talks, when and how), knowledge related to the land, values that respect the environment, Spirituality.
  - Respect for elders' wisdom
  - Consideration of prophecies
  - Health of mother earth and the global environment
5. Primary concern for the **safety and security** of humans and the environment
6. Need for action **NOW**
7. Consultation must be a **2 way street**
8. Recognition and respect for **Aboriginal Treaties and Rights**
9. **Aboriginal representation** in NWMO
10. **Transportation** of waste is a concern
11. Definitions of **community and voluntarism**
12. **Waste importation** from other countries where CANDU reactors are sold
13. What is meant by "**remote**"?
14. Continuing **engagement**
15. Involvement of **youth** in decision-making

## **2.0 Final Words/ Recommendations**

The Native Women's Association of Canada is shocked that they knew so little about the issue of nuclear fuel waste management. The organization was late to engage in the consultation "dialogue process" largely due to a lack of human resources and understanding of the depth and breadth of the issue. However, now that NWAC has been exposed to the issue, NWAC shares the concerns of other Aboriginal organizations and groups. It is important to state that assurances offered by Government and their institutions must be articulated in Law. Too often, Aboriginal people have experienced the negative results of agreements with the mainstream that have been dishonored and ignored. There is no reason to believe that this same deception may occur here "for what is perceived to be the greater good".

NWAC has some proactive ideas as to how to proceed with confronting the challenges of the eventual resolution of the nuclear problem. These include:

1. Increase awareness and education about the issue through the development of curriculum modules at the junior level in schools operated by First Nations and others with a significant Aboriginal population off reserve.
2. Increase Aboriginal and other public awareness by including "facts tied to money" in the power bills of those who use electricity generated by nuclear energy.
3. Promote energy conservation tied to the problem of nuclear waste disposal and agree to a date when the use of nuclear energy will be curtailed.
4. Support and resource the use of alternative energy sources/methods in Aboriginal communities as demonstration projects.
5. Provide resources to enable NWAC Provincial/Territorial Member Associations, particularly (but not exclusively) in Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and, New Brunswick to educate their communities about the nuclear waste issue and to develop solutions.