

Parties Debate Muskrat Falls

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It was the first opportunity for the public to hear the three provincial parties debate the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project. They're all in agreement that there were no real surprises during last night's live affair.

There were smiles and handshakes as Natural Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy, Liberal Leader Dwight Ball and NDP Leader Lorraine Michael sat down in the VOCM studios. The debate lasted just over an hour and included questions ranging from cost overruns to partnerships and deadlines. Ball says some of his questions surrounding the project were answered, but not all of them. Ball says we still don't know how much it's going to cost to bring Muskrat Falls power to Soldier's Pond. Michael says she didn't hear anything new. She says she has and is looking for analysis of alternatives but it doesn't seem to exist.

Kennedy says government is making a big public policy decision and debate is important. He says the current talk around Muskrat didn't happen when the Upper Churchill deal was signed.

As it stands, both Opposition parties remain unconvinced that it's the right time to develop the Lower Churchill. The leader of the New Democrats wants to see the documentation on energy alternatives. Lorraine Michael says she has asked Nalcor for their analysis but it hasn't been provided. Michael says she wants absolute proof that the isolated island option cannot be done with alternatives like thermal, plus small hydro and wind. She says if there is a big need in Labrador for power then they should have a separate plan. Michael says she hasn't seen anything to say that's not the way to go.

Liberal Leader Dwight Ball says all energy options need to be explored. Ball says government needs to expand the scope of the Public Utilities Board review. He says we were told in 2007 that we have an energy warehouse, so there must be something in that warehouse we can explore to meet our needs.

Natural Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy says he doesn't understand how much more proof the Opposition parties need. Kennedy says natural gas as an option would mean the province is again reliant on volatile fuel prices. He says gas right now at \$3/million BTU's is not economically feasible to be developed, Kennedy says it would have to be more in the range of \$10-12/million.

There is a power plan for Labrador, according to the Minister of Natural Resources, but it just hasn't been finalized yet. When questioned about partnerships last night, Jerome Kennedy said discussions are on-going with mining companies in the big land about how they could access Muskrat Falls power. Kennedy says he has met with IOC, Alderon, and Tata Steel. He says built into the project is a 250km line from Muskrat Falls to Churchill Falls. Kennedy says feasibility studies are on-going but there are no signed contracts at this

point. Kennedy says until Labrador industry needs the power it can be sold to the United States, and then taken back as need be. He says if companies want a line built from Churchill Falls to Lab West then they would chip in to help pay for it.

There was plenty of reaction to the debate from listeners on VOCM Nightline with Pete Soucy, many of whom had more questions than they felt were answered. In general however, listeners seemed to appreciate the opportunity to hear the three parties debate the issue. Meanwhile, the debate was one of the key trends in the region on Twitter last night, meaning that a large number of people were tweeting with the Muskrat Falls debate hashtag.

Still with Muskrat Falls, the Department of Environment has determined that an environmental preview report is required for the Maritime Link Transmission Project. The EPR is required to address additional information to help determine the significance of any environmental effects. The public will be invited to provide comments on the EPR upon its submission. Meanwhile, the Component Study on the Labrador-Island Transmission Link has been deemed acceptable. The study on the impact on the fish, fish habitat and water resources was accepted after public, aboriginal and government review. A final revised component study must now be submitted by Nalcor.