



Mercury levels from Muskrat Falls pose threat, says environmental panelist

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According to a new study conducted by a team from Harvard University, the Muskrat Falls project is having an adverse effect on methyl mercury levels in Lake Melville. (CBC)

A member of the Muskrat Falls environmental assessment panel is speaking out after new research from Harvard University suggests the potential for mercury contamination in fish and seal is greater than initially predicted.

Cathy Jong says changes need to be made to ensure that the level of contamination is properly managed.

- **Harvard University: Research on methyl mercury and Labrador**

After reviewing a study that involved Harvard researchers, Nalcor Energy announced it would conduct a follow-up monitoring study and issue consumption advisories when mercury levels rise in Lake Melville.

Jong does not believe the consumption advisories work.

She also cited studies by the Nunatsiavut government that showed when Labrador Inuit switch from country food like fish and seal, they eat alternatives that are worse.

"If people aren't eating that, then they're eating other things that aren't necessarily as healthy for them," said Jong.

Jong believes that the government and Nalcor are not doing enough to minimize the risk of contamination in Lake Melville.

"I'm concerned about the adequacy of it, I'm concerned about the transparency, I'm concerned about participation from the Nunatsiavut government side."

Ignored panel recommendation

Jong said Nalcor ignored a recommendation by the environmental assessment panel to clear all trees



and brush from the reservoir area.



Instead, she said Nalcor predicted there would be dilution in the mercury levels.

Increasing methyl mercury levels in Lake Melville would affect the level of country foods such as fish and seal that people in Labrador eat. (Submitted by Sharlene Webber)

Now, she hopes the company will reconsider the suggestion of clearcutting, which the panel felt was first line of defence in keeping mercury out of the flood zone.

Need to monitor mercury levels closely

"Going ahead we need to monitor very, very carefully what goes on, from the moment the reservoir's flooded, what sort of increases are we seeing."

-Cathy Jong

Jong wants stakeholders in Muskrat Falls to listen to the Harvard study, and take the threat of methyl mercury levels in Lake Melville seriously.

"I think this is solid information, and that's the kind of information that we should be using...so that we have as solid and as scientifically based a response as possible," she said.

Jong is urging Nalcor and the provincial government to ensure full and proper monitoring of Lake Melville.

"It's not something we can ignore."

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