

Methylmercury in Lake Melville at issue, for everyone

More than Nunatsiavut Government calling for change to Muskrat Falls development plan

- 23 Apr 2016
- *The Telegram (St. John's)*
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- THE TELEGRAM

A decision is coming "in the very near future" from Environment Minister and Lake Melville MHA Perry Trimper regarding Nalcor Energy's human health risk assessment plan for Muskrat Falls, according to the department.

It will address Nalcor Energy's understanding of methylmercury movement in the waters extending from the Muskrat Falls development, effectiveness of proposed downstream monitoring and potential mitigation efforts for area communities (use of consumption warnings are proposed for use as needed).

It is the last part in a look by Trimper and staff at the larger environmental effects monitoring program for the project.

The decision, *The Telegram* was told, will take into account input from Nalcor Energy, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Health Canada and the Department of Health and Community Services.

It will take into account the final results of the four-year, Harvard-led study, as released to the public Monday, April 18, at a news conference hosted by the Nunatsiavut Government in St. John's (Trimper was given the results in February, according to a department representative.)

The new study concludes over 200 Inuit downstream from the project could exceed Health Canada guidelines for methylmercury exposure under current development plans, dropping down to 32 people if there is greater clearing of organic material from the reservoir area before it is flooded (as that material leads to greater methylmercury production).

The scientific study was funded by the Nunatsiavut Government, ArcticNet, the Oak Arctic Maritime Fund, the National Science Foundation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the University of Manitoba and the Government of Canada.

Nalcor Energy has not accepted all of the findings, specifically the projections relating to human health effects.

Vice-president Gilbert Bennett said the Crown corporation continues to expect no harm to be caused to people living downstream from Muskrat Falls.

"I think what's changed to a large extent is there's now peerreviewed, independent research from very credible research institutions that show that the methylmercury levels will be higher than intended," NunatuKavut Community Council president Todd Russell said in an interview Friday.

The Lake Melville study focused on roughly 26 per cent of people living in the greater Lake Melville area in the communities of Rigolet, North West River, Sheshatshiu, Mud Lake and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. There are over 7,200 people also in the area who are not represented in the Inuitspecific results.

Methylmercury exposure cannot be extrapolated for the rest based solely on the study report, given the specific data benchmarking the level of reliance on country foods and figures tied to specific foods, determined through targeted surveys (with more methylmercury expected from people eating more salmon than trout, for example, and certain quantities).

Even so, the NunatuKavut president said he has raised the methylmercury issue in meetings with Premier Dwight Ball and the Environment minister, asking the provincial government to give direction to Nalcor to directly engage NunatuKavut on the subject.

At the time of the original environmental review, it was estimated a "full clearing" of the Muskrat Falls reservoir (not including removal of topsoil) would cost at least \$200 million and delay construction.

The standing demand, as made by the Nunatsiavut Government and based on the new study, is for full clearing with topsoil removal.

Money is no argument, Russell said, supporting the call, noting the public-health concern.

He said the Liberal government and new leadership at Nalcor Energy are about to be tested, with an opportunity to prove their commitment to the people of Labrador and to NunatuKavut. "People have to start listening," he said. afitzpatrick@thetelegram.com

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