



Nfld. & Labrador

Nunatsiavut president slams 'empty words' two years after landmark Muskrat agreement



Johannes Lampe wants more done to mitigate methylmercury concerns

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Premier Dwight Ball, second from right, speaks to reporters following a marathon meeting at Confederation Building in St. John's in October 2016. He was joined by, from left, NunatuKavut Community Council head Todd Russell, Nunatsiavut President Johannes Lampe and Innu Nation Grand Chief Anastasia Qupee. (CBC)

Nearly two years after the province reached a deal with Indigenous groups to address methylmercury concerns at Muskrat Falls, one of the leaders who signed it says promises have been broken.

"To me it's empty words and no commitment and certainly no respect to Labrador Inuit and the Indigenous groups in Labrador," said Nunatsiavut President Johannes Lampe this week in an interview with CBC Radio's *Labrador Morning*.

The agreement reached Oct. 26, 2016, included a pledge from Premier Dwight Ball that his government was committed to establishing a special committee that would study possible methylmercury contamination, and opened the door to potential further clearing of the Muskrat Falls reservoir.

"Today's meeting was about one thing: the health of Labradorians," said Ball after making the announcement.

- [**N.L. government, Labrador leaders make 'significant' Muskrat Falls progress**](#)

Indeed, the Independent Expert Advisory Committee that formed following the agreement has since issued four recommendations concerning methylmercury at Muskrat Falls.

Lampe says he wants to see the province follows the independent committee's recommendation to remove soil from the Muskrat Falls reservoir. (Katie Breen/CBC)

Three of those achieved a consensus and were implemented, including water monitoring plans, compensation in the event that methylmercury exposure affects country food, and the development of a public information campaign.

But the committee was unable to reach a consensus on its recommendation that Nalcor undertake a targeted removal of soil and capping of wetlands on the reservoir, after the Innu Nation spoke out about the risk of implementation and voted against it.

- [Contested Muskrat Falls methylmercury recommendation could cost \\$742M](#)

Wants mitigation now

The Nunatsiavut government is pushing to have not just vegetation, but also the soil removed from the area that will be flooded when the Churchill River





delaying its response to recommendations made by the IEAC. The premier's starting to not make time to give the Indigenous groups in Labrador the time to implement them before flooding."

Premier's office says progress has been made

In a statement to CBC News, the premier's office said engagement is continuing, and that in areas where there was consensus, like in the first three recommendations, progress has been made.

"The provincial government continues to monitor water quality for methylmercury levels in the reservoir, downstream, and in Lake Melville, as was agreed by all parties in 2016," reads the statement.

"Since the water quality monitoring was implemented, the methylmercury levels have at no time represented a risk to public health. This water monitoring plan was developed collaboratively with the Indigenous groups, and the data is regularly shared with the groups and the public."

RCMP officers meet protesters at the Muskrat Falls site in October 2016. (Jacob Barker/CBC)

But Lampe remains focused on the failure to implement the fourth recommendation, and says he sees Ball just paying lip service so far to his groups concerns.

"The Premier Dwight Ball, who is also the provincial minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs, talks about the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous people of Labrador ... [but] he continues to show very little respect to concerns that we point out and keep pointing out." he said.

If the province accepts the recommendation to clear soil, it would add to the cost, and further delay the project, which is already billions over budget.

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With files from Peter Cowan and Labrador Morning

