Deputation to Terrace Bay Town Council
May 21, 2024
By
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On Behalf of:

We the Nuclear Free North and Environment North

RE: Concerns About Nuclear Waste in Northwestern Ontario

Introduction:
Thank you for allowing us to speak this evening about a matter that could have serious consequences for our community and all of Northwestern Ontario. We represent WTNFN, an alliance of people and groups, including Environment North, who are opposing a Deep Geological Repository for nuclear waste in Northwestern Ontario. We are also board members of Environment North, an NGO in operation since 1972, which conducts research, education and community advocacy to promote sustainability, protection of the environment and community engagement in decisions impacting the environment.

Background:

1. The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) is in the process of trying to secure a "willing host" where they can dispose of Canada's high level radioactive waste in a deep geological repository (DGR).[1] This process is scheduled to be completed this year. Two potential sites are under consideration: Teeswater, located in the Saugeen Ojibway Nation- South Bruce area and the Revell site in the Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation-Ignace area.

2. There is growing opposition to siting the proposed DGR at the Revell site for a number of reasons. Today we wish to focus on two major concerns directly impacting the residents of Terrace Bay:

- the lack of fairness in excluding communities along the north shore from the "willingness" process; and
- the environmental impact of transporting nuclear waste

Lack of Consultation with Communities Directly Affected by the Proposal

3. The NWMO, a body created by the nuclear industry, has devised a very narrowly-scoped engagement strategy that serves the industry's interests but ignores the views of the

[1] By the end of their lifespans, Canada's existing nuclear reactors are projected to produce more than 5.6 million bundles of fuel waste, weighing over 100,000 tonnes. As of 2023, Canada's existing inventory is about 3.3 million used nuclear fuel bundles. If stacked like cordwood, this high level radioactive waste could fit into about nine NHL hockey rinks from the ice surface to the top of the boards. The NWMO expects these projections to increase with the addition of new nuclear reactors and SMR's. Nuclear Waste Management Organization Nuclear Fuel Waste Projections in Canada -2023 Update

majority of people impacted by their decision. Their consultation process has failed to engage or seek consent from the residents of Terrace Bay and other communities along the transportation route even though they will be directly affected by the shipments of high-level radioactive waste by rail or by road for a period of 50 years.

4. The necessity of having "**broad public support**", to ensure the acceptability of any disposal method for managing nuclear fuel wastes, has been a guiding principle for the nuclear industry in Canada since the Seaborn Panel completed their independent environmental assessment of the DGR concept in 1998.[2] International norms for the siting of nuclear waste disposal have continued to include a decision-making process that embodies **procedural fairness and public acceptance**.[3]

5. Despite paying lip service to the principle of ensuring there is "willingness" for their decision, NWMO has unilaterally decided to seek consent from only two small communities in Northwestern Ontario – Ignace and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation - with a combined population of about 1,360 residents. Meanwhile the rest of us in Northwestern Ontario have been shut out from the consultation process. The Revell site is not in Ignace boundaries.

6. We believe a project of this magnitude, with an environmental footprint and risk to our health and safety of this scale, should at the very least be a regional decision. The consultation process NWMO has followed is a far cry from gaining broad public support as recommended by the Seaborn Panel.

Willingness Process

7. The NWMO states that they will only proceed in an area with "willing and informed hosts." "Willingness" suggests consent is freely given. However, the power imbalance between the nuclear industry and the small, regionally-isolated and economically-marginalized communities of Ignace and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation is huge. The recently completed voting process in Ignace was not at all straightforward. Rather, a consultant was hired to study community willingness using an online poll to the willingness engagement committee who will in turn make a recommendation to council on whether to proceed or withdraw as a potential host community for an underground nuclear waste repository.

9. The NWMO has deep pockets (funded by utility ratepayers) and has been trying to buy consent by pouring cash into these communities to seek their support. To date, Ignace has received an estimated $10 million with millions more promised upon the signing of the hosting agreement.

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[2] Environmental Assessment Report on AECL's Geologic Disposal Concept for High Level Radioactive Waste, Executive Summary (http://www.ccnr.org/hlw_fearo_summary.html)

[3] Yokoyama, M., Ohnuma, S., Osawa, H. *et al.* Public acceptance of nuclear waste disposal sites: a decision-making process utilising the 'veil of ignorance' concept. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* **10**, 623 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02139-2

10. Similarly, “informed” implies that the community has received objective information about the risks and benefits of being a host community. However, the NWMO either avoids or downplays the economic, social and environmental costs of managing radioactive waste.

11. The plan to transport, process and bury high-level nuclear waste is not a complete plan. It includes a number of ‘concepts’ which are still being developed, and there are large gaps in the information**.** How can the residents be informed about a plan that lacks concrete details and material facts?

Environmental Justice

12. A fundamental principle of environmental justice is that environmental benefits and burdens should be equitably distributed among all persons, rather than unfairly imposing the majority of adverse impacts upon Indigenous and/or marginalized communities. We do not benefit from nuclear energy in Northwestern Ontario so why should we bear the burden of storing its waste? Our energy supply comes from hydro, biomass, solar and wind. It is Southern Ontario and New Brunswick that have relied on and reaped the benefits from nuclear power. In keeping with the proximity principle, and environmental justice, nuclear waste ought to be stored as close to the site of generation as possible.

13. There are many technical challenges to claims that the repository will be able to prevent radioactive materials leaking out into the water and earth over the hundreds of thousands of years for which they will remain hazardous. There are uncertainties about the properties of the fuel, the behaviour of the geological formations and the ability of the technology to withstand environmental pressures over such an immense time frame as well as the possibility of cataclysmic events. While our generation may not experience the negative consequences of this plan, it is an intergenerational injustice to burden people not yet born with the impacts caused by burying radioactive waste.

14. Multiple First Nations in Robinson Superior and Treaty 3 territories, as well as municipalities along the transportation route such as Red Rock and Nipigon or downstream from the proposed site such as Grassy Narrows and LaVallee have expressed opposition to the NWMO proposal. By joining these communities, Terrace Bay will be speaking up for the environment and telling the NWMO that they oppose their unreasonable scheme to make Northwestern Ontario the dumping ground for all of Canada’s high level nuclear waste.