

September 26, 2008
Telegraph Journal

Energy minister comfortable with process to find nuclear waste site

Cole Hobson

MONCTON - The Nuclear Waste Management Organization is seeking public input as it begins the process of trying to find a long-term storage facility site in New Brunswick for spent nuclear fuel.

Although the province has been named as a potential site for the storage facility, Energy Minister Jack Keir says it's too early to pass judgment on the merits of such a facility.

"I think we're at the very, very beginning of this process. Certainly we've had discussions with the organization on the process that is going to take place. But my view is, at this point, for me this is a non-issue, I'd rather let the process take place," Keir says.

"My view would be to let the process take place and let's see if New Brunswick is even capable of storing this waste."

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization was established in 2002 by Ontario Power Generation Inc., Hydro-Quebec and NB Power, under the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act. The organization is responsible for the long-term management of Canada's used nuclear fuel.

Mike Krizanc, spokesman for the organization, says it has launched a cross-country dialogue in which they are asking Canadians to help develop a fair process for selecting the site of a long-term storage facility.

From those suggestions, a proposal will be drafted that will be subject to public review, he says.

Krizanc says it could be two years or more before the begin gauging interest from various communities to host the site.

Also, unlike uranium exploration which popped up around the province against the will of many concerned citizens, Krizanc says if a nuclear waste storage facility landed in New Brunswick, it would be because the community wanted it.

"We're not going to impose this on any community. We'll be seeking an informed and willing community and we will provide the info the communities need so they can make their own decisions based on their own interests," he says.

Keir says speculating on whether or not New Brunswickers would be accepting of such a facility could be a moot point, since the organization could end up finding out the province isn't scientifically suitable for the long-term facility.

At this point, the minister says he doesn't believe it's something New Brunswickers need to worry about.

"If there was a particular community in New Brunswick that stepped forward and wanted to do, it we'd certainly sit down with them and see what the opportunities are, but it's way too early in the process," Keir says.

"I don't want to alarm anybody, I'd rather let the process take place and see what the end result of their study concludes and we'll move from there."

Along with New Brunswick, the site selection focus will be in Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan, all of

which are also nuclear provinces.

Krizanc is quick to add that if a community in a different province was willing to play host to the facility, they would also be considered.

While Keir says the issue is not currently something for New Brunswickers to be concerned about, at least one of the province's most vocal environmentalist activists isn't convinced.

"Are they out of their minds," says Christian Theriault.

Theriault, who formed the coalition group Citizens against Uranium Mining and travelled the province speaking at anti-uranium information sessions, says he isn't sure logistically how such a storage facility could work.

"I don't have a clue where they would put something so eternally toxic and not put so many people around here in danger," he says.

Krizanc says the current process of storing Canada's nuclear waste presents no immediate danger, but they are seeking a longer-term solution.

"It's safely managed now, there's no urgency to move the material from where it is. We have time and therefore we have no timetable set out for when the repository would be built and the material would move there," he says.

If it is determined that New Brunswick is a suitable location for that long-term storage, Keir says the province will perform their due diligence.

"I'm very comfortable with the process and we'd just like to see it continue. When the time comes for New Brunswick's input, we'll certainly give it," he says.

Members of the public interested in weighing in on the process of selecting a site can participate in an online discussion or complete a survey on the the organization website, www.nwmo.ca.