

MEDIA RELEASE

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Independent Expert Advisory Committee (IEAC) Issues Recommendations for the protection of Human Health related to the Muskrat Falls Project

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, NL – Following a meeting on April 5, 2018, the Independent Expert Advisory Committee (IEAC) issued a set recommendations on the monitoring, management and mitigation of potential methylmercury impacts of the Lower Churchill Project to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, the Honourable Eddie Joyce.

The IEAC's recommendations follow eight months of research and analysis carried out by its subcommittee of independent scientists and Indigenous Knowledge experts.

The IEAC recommends that a public information campaign be undertaken to communicate that, based on scientific evidence, current practices related to consumption of country food and water are safe.

This communication should include standard advice to pregnant women and the community at large that it is important to eat country foods, including fish and seal, and advice on choosing those that are high in important nutrients and low in methylmercury such as salmon, brook trout and smelt. This recommendation was made with the full consensus of the IEAC.

The IEAC recommends that an independent body oversee the design and implementation of a monitoring program for the Lower Churchill Project, ensuring that it is community-based, and that it provides information that is relevant to the protection of human health.

This monitoring program, which would build on the existing program required by provincial and federal regulators, would provide information that is current and that answers the questions people have about the country foods that they are eating. The independent body overseeing the enhanced monitoring would work with the Indigenous and local population to help communicate, interpret and respond appropriately to monitoring results. This recommendation was made with the full consensus of the IEAC.

The IEAC recommends that the Province, Nalcor Energy, Indigenous groups and the local populations negotiate an Impact Security Fund prior to full flooding. The purpose of the fund is to guarantee continued access to local country food, or safe alternatives, if methylmercury exposures increase above pre-established thresholds, despite mitigation efforts.

The Impact Security Fund should be tied to the monitoring program so that if methylmercury concentrations in country foods reach pre-established thresholds, the fund would be used to compensate for lost food and traditional harvesting practices, and for the associated physical and mental health impacts of this loss. This recommendation was made with the full consensus of IEAC voting members.

In addition, while the IEAC was not able to achieve consensus with respect to mitigation, based on votes by three of the four voting members, the IEAC recommends that Nalcor Energy undertake targeted removal of soil and capping of wetlands in the future reservoir area before impoundment.

This recommendation includes:

- the removal to a depth of at least 50cm of topsoil from an approximate 10.3km² land area of the reservoir where vegetation has already been removed, avoiding steep slopes and waterways, and
- covering the wetlands with a 50cm cap of low organic soil and aggregate;

and is based on scientific evidence for the linear relationship between organic carbon and methylmercury production on flooded land.

Three of the voting members (Nunatsiavut Government, NunatuKavut Community Council and Affected Municipalities) voted in favor; the Innu Nation supported covering the wetlands.

Backgrounder

The mission of the IEAC is to oversee and provide independent assessment of the adequacy of mitigation, monitoring and management measures, and provide recommendations to the Responsible Ministers with respect to those and addition of any further such measures for the protection of the health of the Indigenous and local population impacted by the Lower Churchill Project, with particular focus on methylmercury in country foods in the Churchill River and downstream, including Lake Melville.

The IEAC's Oversight Committee is comprised of four voting members - the Innu Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, NunatuKavut Community Council and the Affected Municipalities, as well as representatives of the provincial and federal governments and Nalcor. The establishment of the IEAC was a key agreement reached between the Provincial Government and the three Indigenous groups on October 26, 2016 to make recommendations on mitigating potential impacts of methylmercury from the Lower Churchill Project at Muskrat Falls, Labrador, NL. The IEAC is advised by an Independent Expert Committee (IEC) made up of three Indigenous Knowledge and six scientific experts. The IEC is appointed by the members of the IEAC.

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Links:

IEAC Website: www.ieaclabrador.ca

[Letter from the IEAC Chair to Minister Eddie Joyce, April 10, 2018 and associated documents](#)

[Terms of Reference for the IEAC](#)

[Chair Appointed to Independent Expert Advisory Committee](#)

[Work of Independent Expert Advisory Committee \(IEAC\) Begins – Independent Experts and Research Director Appointed](#)

[Independent Expert Advisory Committee \(IEAC\) Issues its first set of Recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment](#)