

Ecology Action Centre Statement on Muskrat Falls

Statement of Support for Nunatsiavut Government and Local Communities

-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

October 24, 2016, K'JIPUKTUK (Halifax) The Ecology Action Centre offered its support, today, to local communities around Lake Melville who are demanding mitigation measures are taken, regarding methylmercury poisoning related to the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development.

The flooding of the dam's reservoir – which is set to take place this month – would flood a 41 square kilometer area of existing forest. The resulting decaying plant life would release naturally occurring methylmercury – a potent neurotoxin - into the Lake Melville watershed, upstream. A recent [Harvard Study](#) shows the levels of methylmercury would increase by as much as 200%.

"It's important that this project is done right, and that the concerns of the Inuit and local governments are addressed" said Stephen Thomas, Energy Campaign Coordinator with the Ecology Action Centre.

The Ecology Action Centre supports the four main recommendations of the Nunatsiavut Government, which have been presented to provincial government and are included on their online petition (<http://makemuskratright.com/petition/>).

The recommendations include full clearing of the reservoir area, further mitigation studies, utilization of Inuit knowledge, and joint decision-making authority for aboriginal people. Two of the recommendations are based on the Environmental Assessment panel for the project.

The Nunatsiavut Government is calling for these and other mitigation efforts along with the NunatuKavut Community Council, the Innu Nation, the Cartwright Township, and the Township of Happy-Valley Goose-Bay.

"If there is an option that greatly reduces the risk of poisoning the Lake Melville watershed and the food supply for thousands of people, I think it's more than reasonable that the proponents take that option" said Thomas.

The Ecology Action Centre noted that many of the benefits of the project have also yet to come to pass in Nova Scotia's energy planning. "We think that Muskrat Falls, in combination with the Maritime Link, can provide an opportunity for Nova Scotia to introduce plans for a phase-out of coal-fired electricity, and support the integration and expansion of renewables," said Thomas. "But we just haven't seen that yet."

Thomas continued, "This is an important piece of how Nova Scotia is currently planning its electricity future - It's crucial that we make every effort to make this project right, and to strengthen our current climate and environmental goals."

Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, Dwight Ball, is set to meet with aboriginal leaders on Tuesday to discuss the project.

"We feel that the proponents are being given an opportunity to make this project right, and we stand with the Nunatsiavut Government and local communities by encouraging them to take that opportunity." said Thomas

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Recommendations from the Nunatsiavut Government:

1. Fully clear the future Muskrat Falls reservoir area of wood, brush, vegetation, and topsoil before flooding to mitigate as much as possible increases in methyl mercury exposures for downstream Inuit populations, building on recommendation 4.5 of the Lower Churchill EA panel. Until full clearing is carried out, Muskrat Falls reservoir flooding must not be allowed.
2. Negotiate an Impact Management Agreement with the Nunatsiavut Government to the satisfaction of all parties before Muskrat Falls reservoir flooding and subsequent adverse downstream impacts occur, consistent with recommendation 13.9 of the Lower Churchill EA Panel.
3. Establish an independent Expert Advisory Committee of recognized experts, including from the academic community, to advise on mitigation measures and the design and audit of a rigorous, credible, and predictive monitoring program related to downstream impacts of Muskrat Falls using the best available scientific and Inuit knowledge.
4. Grant Inuit joint decision-making authority over downstream environmental monitoring and management of Muskrat Falls through the creation of an Environmental Management Board, to which the Expert Advisory Committee on monitoring would report.

See the <http://makemuskratright.com/petition/> website for full position and background from the Nunatsiavut Government.