

Community Engagement Session Summary Report – Deep River, May 19

The objective of the Integrated Strategy for Radioactive Waste's (ISRW) community engagement sessions is to invite and facilitate broad dialogue to develop a strategy for managing Canada's radioactive waste, in particular low- and intermediate-level waste. We approach this goal by listening to the perspectives of attendees across multiple Canadian communities. The development of the strategy is grounded in a range of guiding principles and objectives as we explore key questions and issues discussed at our events. This summary report details what we heard from the participants at the session focused on the community of Deep River.

The session began with a brief land acknowledgement, recognizing and expressing gratitude for the land we are on. This was followed by an introduction and an overview of logistics for the evening. The event offered several opportunities for attendees to participate, give feedback and ask questions about various topics.

Attendees were asked to associate which words came to mind when they heard “the management of radioactive waste in Canada.”

Participants associated the words transportation, pre-disposal, long-term management, confusing, and disorganized.

Participants explained that a deep geological disposal was discussed as a permanent solution within this community but did not happen, and that this type of occurrence produced confusion on the issue with communities opting in then opting out over time. As such, there is a sense within the community of Deep River that plans have been disorganized. However, it was said that our current long-term plan shows promise for the future. The participants expressed hope that this current attempt at plotting a course will not fall through the cracks as previous plans have.

We asked if the attendees thought the following guiding principles addressed or reflected the most important aspects that a Canadian strategy for the long-term management of radioactive waste should include and what we need to ensure. And having heard from other participants, is there anything they would like added?

We described the principles that guide every aspect of the ISRW project and asked the audience to review these principles and tell us if anything is missing or should be modified. The strategy must:

- have safety as the overarching principle
- ensure the security of facilities, materials, infrastructure, and information
- ensure that the environment is protected
- meet or exceed regulatory requirements
- informed by the best available knowledge, includes Indigenous Traditional Knowledge
- respect Indigenous rights and Treaties
- developed in a transparent manner that informs and engages the public, including youth and Indigenous peoples
- developed and implemented in a fiscally responsible manner
- make use of existing projects

The guiding principles were well received, and the overall sentiment is that they are comprehensive. The attendees were pleased about our strong focus on Indigenous rights. We heard the importance of being

able to clearly express the principles regarding Indigenous peoples and their knowledge, adding that transparency and a focus on Indigenous rights is important. It was also mentioned that the process is transparent, and this is something that those who know the NWMO believe we do well.

We heard from our attendees that timing should be more deeply integrated into the presentation, and that a proper timescale describing the project's long-term goals would be of value. This perspective emerged from false starts attached to previous plans for managing low- and intermediate-level waste. Though past efforts have not been viewed as successful, there was an overall feeling of positivity about this initiative. As a result of this positivity, we were asked to elaborate on time – not in the sense of urgency, but what the end-of-life will look like for this waste, and to describe a lifecycle approach as this will be ongoing for millennia.

As to what participants felt may be missing from the list, there was an interest in including a guiding principle focused on legacy waste.

We asked participants to consider the information we presented and this important challenge, and then asked what is most important for us to get right when developing Canada's plan for managing waste.

We heard from participants that they appreciated the visuals and videos presented in the session. They were found to be effective in educating attendees and noted as good starting points to stir conversation. Participants also acknowledged that the Deep River community already held a significant amount of knowledge on nuclear waste.

It was noted that the way we manage waste now is of a temporary nature, with no clear vision on the end of management. The audience expanded on this by pointing to the current problem of double and even sometimes triple-handling radioactive waste rather than having a clear approach to handling it once and correctly. This approach must become optimized and consistent, and the most important factor that needs consistency is safety.

We heard that consistency was key, specifically when discussing low-level waste. Participants expressed confusion surrounding why some low-level waste is stored at surface level, but some waste needs to be stored below ground. This is an example of the lack of consistency that we heard from participants.

We also heard that there are people who would feel resentful if their community was considered for a waste disposal facility but had not generated any radioactive waste. However, participants understand that these situations arise when the geology near nuclear facilities is not fit for a below surface radioactive waste facility. For example, participants highlighted that people in western Canada tend to have unfavourable views of radioactive material and reactors.

Another significant concern arose regarding intermediate-level waste: the waste can vary from quite low contamination levels to being very highly contaminated and dangerous. We heard that it can be difficult to discuss intermediate-level waste as one issue because of this variability.

It was asked if we should manage the waste locally from where it is produced, or if it ought to be outsourced.

We heard that, in the past, site selection has led to wrinkles being created between communities – in some ways pitting one community against the other. However, affected communities are aware of some of the science and bear in mind the differences in geology which play a strong factor in site selection.

Throughout the session, the participants were adamant that public safety and the health of the environment is paramount when dealing with radioactive waste.

We asked in what manner should we deal with Canada's low- and intermediate-level waste over the long-term.

We heard the viewpoint that having separate facilities for low- and intermediate-level waste would be favourable since they both present unique opportunities. It would lower the need for transportation and would create jobs in multiple communities. Participants stated that having one facility for the whole country would be unreasonable.

Most respondents expressed support for having multiple long-term storage sites across the country that are located near the areas where waste is generated. It was reiterated that there is anti-nuclear bias existing in Canada, particularly more so in the western provinces.

Three different options were given for implementing Canada's solution and asked to be discussed. The first option is putting low-level and intermediate waste in one or more specially designed disposal facility/facilities. The second option is continuing to store and monitor low-level waste on the surface as it is now. And third, could either option be fine so long as all safety regulations are met?

We heard that option number one, having a national body, would be ideal and was nearly unanimously agreed upon. Respondents felt that there are many benefits from collaboration, and there is an enjoyment from seeing this type of efficiency. Still, it was acknowledged that there are challenges, including Indigenous rights and site selection issues but different companies coming together would be the overall best solution. It was added that one regulatory entity to oversee everything and bring stakeholders together would likely be required.