

Mr. Sean Kelly

Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board

Via email skelly@cnlopb.nl.ca

September 27, 2013

Dear Sir :

RE : SEA Update for Western Newfoundland and Labrador, June 2013

I have read the Summary Report completed by AMEC Consultants and portions of the 400+page document it abstracts.

My background includes twelve years as an Environmental Planner with the Ministries of Transportation and Environment in Ontario and over twenty in land conservation, focusing on habitat of species-at-risk. As a civil servant I prepared environmental assessments for highway projects ranging from bridge replacement to twinning of existing facilities to new highway rights-of-way. With the Ministry of Environment, my job was to review and provide Ministry positions on environmental assessments for hydro dams, highways and other public utilities. My educational background in environmental studies, combined with related work experience and 30+ years of reading on environmental issues contribute to my concern with both offshore petroleum projects and the documents put into the public realm to assure the public of their benign nature.

There is inherent conflict of interest in an appointed Board (the C-NLOPB in this case) established to "facilitate" offshore petroleum projects as well as issue and administer rights to do so. Being both promoter and regulator establishes unacceptable self-policing arrangements which serve to benefit the proponent of an activity. In this case the activity, petroleum exploitation, has unspoken (in the report) but very real public consequences and costs. The federal government, of which the C-NLOPB is an offshoot, seems determined to lock Canada into a petroleum-based future regardless of the effects on Canadians or their basic ecological needs. So I guess there is no surprise that an appointed body will do nothing if not mimic its political masters, however misguided they are.

Today, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its 5th Assessment Report on global climate change, citing a 95% certainty that the phenomenon is caused by human activity, in particular, the burning of fossil fuels. While the SEA Update acknowledges negative "interactions" (consultants' word) with marine wildlife and water quality, where is the section on air quality? Why are greenhouse gas emissions expected from the project's production, and subsequent burning, of hydrocarbons not even mentioned in this report?

Even the section on "cumulative effects" ignores air quality consequences of the undertaking. Somehow cumulative effects have been narrowly defined as "potential effects that may result from oil and gas activities in combination with each other and with other projects and activities **in the area**" (emphasis added). Global climate change itself exemplifies the impact of cumulative effects. Are we to

understand that the many millions of barrels of petroleum produced by activities in the Gulf will not add to the cumulative effect of climate change?

For your reference, IPCC Working Group Co-Chair Thomas Stocker, said in a press release today that “Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions,” http://www.ipcc.ch/news_and_events/docs/ar5/press_release_ar5_wgi_en.pdf . One could reach the logical conclusion, from this finding of internationally-esteemed climate scientists, that there should be no petroleum exploration in the Gulf of St. Lawrence AT ALL. It appears AMEC is either overlooking a key body of evidence on emissions and climate change, or is, itself, in denial.

The SEA Update states that the largest concentration of seabirds occurs in the Gulf between January and March. This mid-winter period coincides with the least hospitable weather and ice conditions, suggesting that a spill or disaster involving drilling platforms during these months could have disastrous impacts on these populations, many of which are species-at-risk. How is the threat that offshore drilling represents to endangered species an acceptable one? The reason they are ‘at-risk’ is because of the cumulative effects of human activities and destruction of habitat. Yet this fails to enter into the discussion in the report; likewise the continued decline in marine mammals at the top of the food chain and the acidification of the oceans are nowhere to be seen. Nor are they mentioned as conditions that will be worsened by projects permitted in future in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

I note with interest that AMEC reports that on-shore drilling (fracking) has generated “interest and discussion” during public consultation meetings. While I did not attend these meetings, from my experience and observations of the public’s stance on fracking here in New Brunswick, I might characterize public response more as “concern and fear,” and for good reason. The SEA Update reports that better communication with interested parties is needed. This statement epitomizes the arrogance of government and vested interests directed towards their well-informed adversaries (the public). The reason there is concern and fear is because of the many well-documented cases of fracking causing illness, fouling air and water and rendering drinking water wells unusable. The many class-action lawsuits being launched against fracking companies in the United States are testament to the seriously detrimental effects this industry can have.

Finally, fracking has no social acceptance in the Maritimes. Why does this not appear in the SEA Update? The Summary Report might also have documented that the CNLOPB was not well-received in several jurisdictions that will be negatively affected by oil spills, yet that will not even conceptually benefit financially (for example, the Magdelene Islands). All these people can do is contemplate a future spill or blowout, and reflect on the illness among the people and deformities of wildlife caused by the BP event in the Gulf of Mexico. Many Gulf communities have yet to recover from the Deepwater Horizon disaster, and huge portions of the water body still suffer from the event’s long-lasting negative effects.

In addition to the above broad comments, I have had several extended conversations with the St. Lawrence Coalition and others expert in the matters affecting the Gulf. I agree with concerns raised by the Coalition on the SEA Update and provide them here to underscore their importance.

- 1) C-NLOPB should find that oil and gas activities should not be allowed in Newfoundland's part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence for the following reasons:
 - a. The draft report shows a complete lack of social acceptability in all five Gulf provinces;
 - b. Newfoundland's part of the Gulf has many sensitive and unique sectors, vital to the Gulf ecosystem's health;
 - c. Knowledge gaps are significant and should be filled;
 - d. Fisheries and tourism are very important and show that cohabitation with oil and gas activities would be very difficult;
 - e. The draft report says that the efficiency of proposed mitigation measures is not proven.
- 2) AMEC's report is weak in many aspects and is not adequate to serve as a decision tool for the C-NLOPB. In particular:
 - a. Comments and briefs presented by the public in the Fall 2012 were not correctly addressed and integrated in the draft report;
 - b. Impacts and risks of offshore oil and gas activities as well as hydraulic fracturing have been minimized throughout the report;
 - c. Economic importance of fisheries and tourism are greater than shown in the draft report;
 - d. Mitigation measures proposed by AMEC are weak and intervention capacity, in case of an oil spill, are clearly inadequate.

Sincerely,



Margo Sheppard

