

**Participants' Comments and Recommendations
Pertaining to the Assessment and Impacts of Megaprojects
at the
38th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists,
in collaboration with the
Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network,
St. John's, October 1-3, 1998**

compiled by Conference Co-Chairmen
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LINKS

- [Ryan Environmental.](#)
- [Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists.](#)
- [Assessment and Impacts of Megaprojects, St. John's, Oct.1998.](#)
- [Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dept. of Biology.](#)
- [Pat Ryan's MUN Page.](#)

Introduction

The Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists (CSEB) is Canada's largest national, non-governmental association of professional biologists with members from across Canada and some other countries. The

overall objective of the Society is encourage the management of our natural resources based on sound ecological principals. The Society facilitates interaction among its members and between the Society and the public, and thus tries to provide a balanced, well-informed view on environmental issues. Through its conferences, the CSEB brings together persons with varied interests and backgrounds for the exchange of information and points of view.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization with a mandate to facilitate communication and joint initiatives among groups and organizations which share a concern for the environment of Newfoundland and Labrador. The CSEB is a member of the Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network.

The 1998 CSEB Annual Meeting was designed to constructively review environmental assessment goals, processes, achievements, and failures; particularly as they apply to large-scale projects. It was intended that the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society would contribute to an increased understanding of the topic areas and improvements in the processes.

Methods

The 38th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists was held at the Battery Hotel and Suites in St. John's, Newfoundland followed by a van and boat tour of the Southern Avalon Peninsula. Eighty-one participants registered for the Annual Meeting.

Sessions consisted of 21 invited and contributed papers as oral or poster presentations from 9:00 a.m. Thursday October 1 to 3:30 p.m. Friday October 2, 1998. Subsequent to the presentations, participants convened for a final session where their comments and recommendations pertinent to environmental assessment were transcribed by the Conference Co-Chairmen.

Results

Following, in approximately the order in which they were put forward, are the participants' comments and recommendations pertaining to the assessment and impacts of megaprojects.

1/ Governments must enforce their own rules and regulations.

2/ When a project is released by the Responsible Authority, all permits must have been satisfied (ie. no permits, no project). This re-emphasizes number 1.

3/ Environmental impact statements and relevant studies should be peer reviewed by the independent scientific community and the peer review should be made public.

4/ The plan, scope, terms of reference, and level of effort must be peer reviewed and publicized (including the peer review) prior to undertaking the environmental assessment (similar to number 3but prior to the start of environmental assessment).

5/ Governments should not be exempt from environmental assessments with regards to programs, policies, or activities.

6A/ Governments must have adequate resources to conduct reviews of environmental impact assessment. Adequate resources must be in place to conduct credible assessments and deadlines must be met. It was

commented that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has only one person involved with environmental assessment monitoring.

6B/ Responsibilities of proponents or governments for costs of undertaking reviews, preparation of environmental impact statements, etc. was a topic discussed with differences of opinion as to who should be responsible. Participants agreed that this matter needs to be carefully addressed.

7/ Governments must resource agencies and other interests (ie. First Nations) responsible for review and development of project specifications.

8/ Study and assess broad issues such as cumulative impacts within partnerships rather than leaving such work to a single proponent.

9/ Environmental assessment should be done at "arm's length" from governments and proponents by an independent agency of some form. An appropriate non-conflict distance between the regulators and the practitioners of environmental assessment and supporting studies must be maintained.

10/ The environmental assessment process should be a lot more focused and efficient (ie. study essentials well, not everything poorly). Environmental assessment studies should focus on key issues that can be scientifically examined. Experience gained from other projects should be used to assist in the focussing efforts and in writing the environmental assessment. Increased focus will increase the scientific credibility and cost-effectiveness.

11/ Ensure high quality government review and participation in the environmental assessment process.

12/ Government agencies should not stray from their departmental mandates and participants in the process should understand that environmental assessment approval is not automatically a decision to proceed with the project.

13/ All of the process must be transparent to all.

14/ Realistic timelines should be applied and adhered to. A continuing complaint from industry is that government does not provide input in a timely fashion.

15/ Environmental assessment should not be done to defend decisions already made (or taken).

16/ The community should be able to decide whether or not a project is needed or required and the opportunities must be provided for the community to decide the same (ie. Use traditional ecological knowledge). Prior to project notification, proponents should establish formal communications with the community and mechanisms for community input. In other words, prior to the "official" start, tell the people.

17/ Agencies should do more class evaluations (ie. roads, trails, cities) so that this information will contribute to existing knowledge (ie. contribute to cumulative effects studies) and make the process more efficient and more mindful of lessons learned elsewhere.

18/ Definitions under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act need to be improved (ie. "significant public concern" is too subjective). Subjectivity must be removed.

19/ Enhance the educational and procedural capabilities of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and reduce focus on process.

20/ The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency must have the ability to enforce laws pertinent to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. As examples, a penalty clause for enforcement should be implemented and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency could enforce the Fisheries Act.

21/ Use environmental effects monitoring more extensively to improve future environmental assessments.

Discussion

It is reasonable to conclude from the participants' comments and recommendations that environmental assessment processes are very important but that they have not been completely satisfactory as currently practiced. Improvements are required.

Participants' comments and recommendations are indicative of needed improvements in: consistency of application; quality of assessment; financial resources for assessment; openness or transparency of the processes; law enforcement and; environmental effects monitoring.

It is obvious that there are uncertainties and differences of opinion among biologists as to who should pay for environmental assessment. Participants agreed that this matter must be carefully addressed

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