

## **ENGAGING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: THE WORK OF THE NWMO MUNICIPAL FORUM**

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### **ABSTRACT (AS PER TITLE)**

Canada's plan for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel, called Adaptive Phased Management (APM), will be implemented in an informed and willing host community. As the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) designs and refines its plans and processes for selection of that community, it is critical for the organization to understand the local and community perspective. The NWMO has undertaken a number of initiatives to increase this understanding, to build relationships, and to work with municipal representatives and community leaders to develop long-term frameworks for decision-making at the local level. The activities have included seeking advice through ongoing meetings with nuclear host communities; engagement of national and provincial associations/federations; and participation in the annual conferences and trade shows of municipal associations in the four nuclear provinces (Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick). In addition to building relationships, the NWMO is increasing its knowledge about municipal structures and policy-making processes, administration, land-use and community planning, political oversight and community engagement. As interested communities come forward to learn more about APM, they may access the NWMO "Learn More" program, which makes information and funding available to assist communities and individuals in learning more about APM and the site-selection process. In 2008, the NWMO and senior municipal leaders from the four nuclear provinces agreed to form a Municipal Forum, which was launched in December of that year. The NWMO Forum was modelled, in part, on a construct in the United Kingdom known as NuLeAF, which provided local perspectives considered key to the success of the nuclear waste management initiative in that country. The NWMO Municipal Forum brings together municipal experts to provide information about best practices for communicating with local governments and their communities. The Forum members represent large and small, urban, rural and northern communities and advise the NWMO on broad policies based on their professional, political, community and personal expertise and experience. The Forum has provided valuable insights and feedback, including guidance on enhancing communications materials for municipalities, and on potential collaborative research projects for communities that choose to take part in the site-selection process. The Forum has helped the NWMO better understand how to communicate and work with municipalities, while also being an effective conduit to municipal associations, their affiliates and membership, and a wide range of professional associations, locally, provincially and nationally.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The mission of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) is to develop and implement, collaboratively with Canadians, a management approach for the long-term care of

Canada's used nuclear fuel that is socially acceptable, technically sound, environmentally responsible and economically feasible.

Broad and ongoing stakeholder engagement is a core principle guiding fulfillment of this mission. Following its establishment in 2002 under the *Nuclear Fuel Waste Act (NFWA)*, the NWMO undertook a three-year national dialogue and study to evaluate options and recommend a management approach for used nuclear fuel. Through engagement of more than 18,000 citizens and specialists, and 2,500 Aboriginal people, Adaptive Phase Management (APM) emerged as the preferred Canadian approach.

In 2007, the Government of Canada accepted the NWMO recommendation to proceed with APM. The organization then began its second phase of engagement — involving Canadians in the design of a process to select a site for a deep geological repository (DGR) for used nuclear fuel. Consultations with more than 7,000 people led to the 2010 publication of a process for selecting a host community for the DGR.

Stakeholder engagement will continue to be central to the NWMO's work as the focus shifts to implementing the site-selection process. An important component will be engagement at the municipal/local level—collaboratively developing and refining plans with communities expressing interest in potentially hosting the DGR, as well as with potentially affected communities in the nearby and larger regions, and along the transportation corridor for the used fuel.

## **2. IMPORTANCE OF MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT TO THE NWMO'S WORK**

Engagement at the local level goes to the heart of Adaptive Phased Management (APM) and of the site-selection process.

As they participated in consultations on the process for selecting a site for the DGR, Canadians clearly supported the concept of an “informed and willing” community. The “informed” community will be one that has all the information it needs to make decisions throughout all steps of the selection process. The NWMO will provide information and resources to these communities—supporting research and dialogues to allow full exploration of the impact of this infrastructure project on a community's long-term social, cultural and economic aspirations. The site-selection process has been designed to emphasize community well-being — to ensure that the community that ultimately hosts the DGR will benefit from the project, consistent with its vision for the future.

Communities interested in being considered for the project move through a series of steps at a pace and manner suitable to them — from requesting more information, to initial screenings and participation in site assessments and community dialogue. At any point, they may withdraw from the process.

The “informed and willing” approach also applies to communities in potentially affected surrounding areas. The NWMO is committed to ensuring that all potentially affected communities are informed and engaged in the development and refinement of plans and activities at each stage.

When the host community is chosen, the NWMO will form a partnership with that community to ensure the project fosters well-being and sustainability, and to help in the management of any associated social and economic pressures including in the surrounding region.

Clearly, this project is community-driven and the NWMO recognizes that understanding community priorities and local perspectives is critical. The organization has worked to build this understanding from the earliest days of its work.

### **3. MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS**

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) has undertaken a number of initiatives to increase its understanding of local perspectives, to build relationships, and to work with municipal representatives and community leaders to develop long-term frameworks for decision-making at the local level.

The NWMO consulted and engaged an array of municipal stakeholders as it developed its recommended approach to the long-term care of Canada's used nuclear fuel. After APM was approved as the approach, the NWMO intensified municipal engagement and outreach, to ensure that local and community perspectives were reflected and respected in the site-selection process.

Now that the process has entered the phase where potential host communities are expressing interest, the insights of local stakeholders will continue to be integral to the process.

Early NWMO activities in the area of municipal engagement focused on seeking input and insight on local issues through meetings with communities hosting nuclear waste facilities, as well as with municipal associations in the nuclear fuel-cycle provinces — New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan. The Canadian Association of Nuclear Host Communities (CANHC) and the Durham Nuclear Health Committee (DNHC) provided the NWMO with important advice at each stage of the process of developing Canada's plans for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel. The NWMO continues to strengthen relations with the municipal leaders from CANHC, recognizing the importance of keeping this group well-informed of the progress in its work; these communities will be directly impacted by APM and by the transportation of used nuclear fuel from the existing nuclear facilities within their municipal borders to the eventual host site.

The NWMO has participated in annual conferences and trade shows of municipal associations in the four nuclear provinces. Hundreds of elected and non-elected representatives from municipalities and provincial government delegates attend these events, many of whom have expressed interest in being kept apprised of NWMO activities. The interest expressed by the associations and their regional affiliates has encouraged the NWMO to continue expanding its outreach efforts to similar groups, including professional and quasi-professional organizations. Through participation at these events, the NWMO is able to discuss APM with interested persons, representatives, and decision-makers in person, answer questions, and build a general awareness of the organization and APM. Participation in a variety of municipal conferences will continue to be an important activity.

The NWMO also regularly participates in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Annual Conference, providing an opportunity for all municipalities throughout Canada to learn more about the progress in implementing Canada's plan for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel, and to support the sharing of experience among communities.

At the most recent FCM conference (Halifax, June 3–6, 2011), the NWMO took part in the trade show, where it showcased a travelling exhibit that describes Adaptive Phased Management, and the NWMO's recent activities to implement this plan. The NWMO also sponsored an industry exchange session titled, "Deciding to Host a National Repository for Used Nuclear Fuel:

Swedish Experience." In this session, representatives from two Swedish communities shared their experience with community-driven decision-making processes, using their participation in Sweden's deep geological repository project as a case study. The NWMO invited representatives of communities participating in Canada's site-selection process for Adaptive Phased Management to attend the FCM conference. Community representatives attended the NWMO-sponsored event, and also met representatives of municipal associations in their area, as well as elected representatives of communities that host nuclear facilities, which facilitated a sharing of information and experience. Over the course of the conference, each invited community also met with representatives of the Swedish municipalities to allow for private and frank discussion.

To support the involvement of communities, the NWMO created the "Learn More" Program to begin to make available information and funding to assist communities, organizations and individuals to learn more about APM and to begin to think through their interest in the project. As interested communities come forward to learn more, the NWMO has begun to engage community leaders directly, including representatives of municipal councils, and members of local economic-development offices, chambers of commerce, business leaders and other interested local citizens.

Municipal engagement activities have helped the NWMO to build important relationships with municipal stakeholders. They have also helped the organization to learn about municipal structures and unique provincial processes for policy making, administration, planning, management of Crown land and political oversight. The discussions with municipal associations have also identified many areas of mutual research interests.

#### **4. ADDING DEPTH TO MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT: THE MUNICIPAL FORUM**

In late 2008, the NWMO collaborated with municipal associations from the four nuclear provinces and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to set up the Municipal Forum. A range of Canadians had provided the NWMO with feedback suggesting the value of convening an assembly of representatives with experience and expertise on municipal issues and challenges, as they might apply to the NWMO's mandate and other aspects of the long-term management of used nuclear fuel.

Part of the inspiration for this forum of municipal advisors was a similar body in the United Kingdom, the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum — known as NuLeAF.

##### **4.1 The UK experience with a municipal forum on nuclear waste management**

In the United Kingdom, local authorities are invited to submit expressions of interest to be the host community for a planned geological disposal facility (GDF) and may exercise the right to withdraw at any point. Community views are to be considered throughout the process, through consultations and engagement. In the UK, the decision was made to form the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum (NuLeAF) to provide the local perspectives considered key to the success of the nuclear waste management initiative in that country.

The NuLeAF construct was a relevant model for the Municipal Forum in Canada but not all its features were adopted in this country. In the United Kingdom, there is a different government structure — with a national government and local governments, but no equivalent to Canada's

provincial-government level. This puts municipalities in the position of dealing directly with the national government on issues of shared interest. In 2003, the UK's Local Government Association (LGA) created NuLeAF as a special interest group that could speak for local government at the national level on nuclear legacy management. NuLeAF's role is to ensure that local authority views and interests are recognized and addressed as the UK proceeds with its management plans. Membership is open to the 101 local authorities in England and Wales.

NuLeAF's mandate and activities are different than that of NWMO's Municipal Forum. The UK body speaks on behalf of local government directly; it develops positions based on those of its members and works to engage and influence government, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and other organizations involved in the management of used nuclear fuel. In Canada, the NWMO and its partners envisioned the Municipal Forum as an advisory body that would provide advice, comment, observation and insight on and from the local-government perspective. Forum members do not speak directly for their membership or association but rather, bring their experience and expertise to the discussions.

## **5. MANDATE AND MAKEUP OF CANADA'S MUNICIPAL FORUM**

### **5.1 Purpose of the Forum**

According to its Terms of Reference, the purpose of the Municipal Forum is to “function as a neutral venue that will provide direction for collaborative research that will yield and produce products and tools to assist Canadian municipalities and communities in siting a national infrastructure project.”

The Forum is a group of municipal experts that provide information about best practices for communicating with local governments and associations, and guidance on a research agenda to explore topics that may be of interest to communities that choose to participate in the site-selection process.

Members have helped the NWMO better understand municipal processes and the needs of municipalities with respect to information and communication material that may assist local governments assess their interest, as they consider locating a large, national infrastructure project in their communities.

### **5.2 Makeup of the Forum**

The Forum consists of designated members from various municipal organizations in the four nuclear provinces, and from two national bodies — the Federal of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Canadian Association of Nuclear Host Communities (CANHC). Representatives of the NWMO are also part of the Forum.

The provincial organizations invited to participate are:

- New Brunswick—Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick (UNB) and Cities of New Brunswick Association (CNBA)
- Quebec: L'Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ) and La Fédération Québécoise des Municipalités (FQM)

- Ontario— Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and its affiliates: Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM); the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA); Ontario Small Urban Municipalities (OSUM); and Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)
- Saskatchewan—Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) and Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)

Each organization may have a maximum of two participants, one of whom should be a non-elected member (staff).

The Forum members provide expertise and share their knowledge based on their experience both within their organization (their association, and/or municipality), and from their personal experience at the community level. These experts bring the larger policy perspective to the discussion and they do so from a variety of perspectives, including those of rural, remote and urban communities. The NWMO believed it was important for Forum members not to ask for the endorsement of their association or to attempt to influence the involvement of any of their members in the site-selection process. The neutrality of the Forum helps to preserve the community-driven nature of the entire process.

### **5.3 How the Forum operates**

The Municipal Forum meets periodically throughout the year with a minimum three meetings per annum.

- By the end of July 2011, there had been 10 meetings of the Forum.
- The Forum is managed and chaired by the Director, Municipal & Community Engagement at NWMO.
- The Director also maintains regular contact with the Forum members between meetings.

## **6. THE WORK OF THE MUNICIPAL FORUM**

With their collective municipal experience and understanding of local, rural and urban issues, the Municipal Forum members have provided valuable insights into communicating and working with municipalities. In 2009, when the siting process was being developed, the Forum provided input into this proposed process for siting a deep geological repository and advice on how to communicate with communities that might potentially host the DGR.

In addition to sharing knowledge at a high level about best practices in communicating with municipalities, the Forum has provided advice and feedback on backgrounders, fact sheets and other communications materials, including the NWMO travelling exhibit developed in 2010 for display in interested communities. Members have provided useful input into development of the “Learn More” program for municipalities wanting to explore participation in the siting process. The Forum has also provided guidance on potential collaborative research projects that may be of interest to communities choosing to take part in the site-selection process.

Forum meetings also provide an opportunity for the NWMO to keep municipal stakeholders informed about its ongoing work, and the development of new strategies and plans. The Forum is an important body; it is an effective link to municipal associations and their members, which collectively include more than 2,000 large and small municipal entities. It is also a conduit for outreach to other organizations, including professional and quasi-professional organizations,

service clubs and chambers of commerce in local communities, as well as neighbouring aboriginal groups.

## **7. VALUE OF THE MUNICIPAL FORUM'S CONTRIBUTIONS**

Forum members have been very engaged in their provision of advice to the NWMO. Each of the meetings has been very well-attended, with the participation of 80 to 90 per cent of the members.

The contributions of the Municipal Forum have been significant. Through this process, the NWMO has been able to build important relationships with municipal stakeholders and to lay out frameworks for long-term engagement. In addition to information on communications and research, Forum members have provided the NWMO with information on municipal structures and on provincial processes for policy-making in a number of areas relevant to APM. Also noteworthy is their highlighting of emerging issues and challenges facing municipalities that may prove influential as the NWMO engages community members and organizations.

The two-way flow of information between the NWMO and the other Forum members has been very valuable. While sharing their insights and experiences, these municipal experts have also connected the NWMO to a broader base of local stakeholders. Forum members have hosted the NWMO at municipal conferences and have created other opportunities to address larger audiences. In this way, the Forum has helped the NWMO to reach out to smaller communities, which might otherwise be daunted by the prospect of interacting on their own with a large organization.

Moreover, the fact that they are not advocates for a particular position but are objective providers of information gives the members strong credibility when communicating at the local level.

## **8. CONCLUSION: ANTICIPATED ROLE OF THE MUNICIPAL FORUM MOVING FORWARD**

Under its Terms of Reference, the mandate of the Municipal Forum was to run for two years, ending in 2011, at which time the general mandate, purpose and objectives were to be reviewed. Over the next few years, municipal engagement will intensify. Collaborative refinements to the site-selection process will continue, and the NWMO will be more closely involved with communities moving through that process or expressing interest in learning more about APM, and the details associated with being a host community for a DGR or a community along a potential transportation route.

The NWMO sees the Municipal Forum as a critical component of this ongoing work of engagement and creating opportunities to learn more about APM. Forum members have openly expressed their commitment to continuing to provide the NWMO with “on the ground” information, insight and informed opinion. They are also committed to continuing to serve as an effective conduit for the NWMO to provide information, resources and tools to assist local governments and communities assess their interest in Adaptive Phased Management and the site-selection process.