

EIA NB Duo

by Ronald Fournier - Clearinghouse Group

On March 14, 2000 David Thompson of the Conservation Council and I attended a multi-stakeholder as part of the 5-yr Review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. We were pre-divided into three groups and went our merry way with our facilitators and got down to work.

Our group was asked to discuss "Strengthening opportunities for public participation". Here are some of the main items discussed;

- The lady representing a Metis organization in Labrador explained that her group was left out of the Voisey's Bay EIA. So the issue of recognition of Aboriginal and Metis groups was the first one on the list.

David Thompson recommended that the exclusion list needs to be revisited. Jim Clark, Environment Canada, mentioned that the current idea is to increase the exclusion list. Our ENGO position is rather that it should be decreased. Some voices were raised as we argued this point: yes, there is a difference between installing an outhouse in a federal park and selling Candus to China. However, the problem is that both are overlooked and put in the same category. Actually, it's more likely for the outhouse to be considered!

Another discussion centered around scientific vs anecdotal submissions during hearings (debate was limited), but some of us also stressed the importance of qualitative assessment rather than just quantitative assessment.

As regards participant funding; the 3 enviros present got a chance to bring up and include those items that Brennain Lloyd had suggested in Participant Funding: "Recommended Approaches for Improving CEAA and its Implementation".

Next came Project Outside Canada regulations. Even though there was a special 2 day session in Ottawa a couple of weeks ago, it was good that the subject was brought up again. It gave us a chance to drive home the irony, the foolishness and the sheer stupidity of excluding large hydro-projects, the sale of nuclear reactors, etc. without a proper EIA. It makes a mockery of the whole idea of EIAs.

Ministerial discretion was another topic discussed. We recommended less discretion on the part of the Minister and more input from the public.

We strongly recommended that the Agency do more for educating the public about EA. It's ironic that the Agency puts on education workshops for interested parties; only industry and other departments can afford to pay. The Agency charges a good fee as part of its cost recovery program; so, here we are, charging to teach people about EA while we subsidize AECL at the tune of \$150 million a year and it doesn't even have to undergo an EIA when foisting that technology on 2nd and 3rd world countries!!

Lastly, following the e-mail exchanges and discussions on the subject, I insisted that most environmentalists did not want the so-called "Privative Clause" to be included into the revised act.