

WHAT WE HEARD:

Highlights of Our Conversations about Expectations

Introduction from the President

Early in its process, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) engaged in a series of conversations with individual Canadians and different communities of interest. This is a summary of some of the key insights gained. The purpose of these early meetings, which began in November 2002, was to introduce the newly-created NWMO and to explore expectations about our mandate and how we should conduct our study. Through these preliminary discussions, the NWMO sought to understand how individuals and groups wished to be consulted and involved in the development of advice about an approach to the long-term management of Canada's used nuclear fuel.

The NWMO initiated face-to-face conversations with more than 250 individuals and representatives of organizations at local, provincial, national and international levels. These included representatives of aboriginal organizations, nuclear power plant workers, youth, residents of nuclear power plant communities, environmental groups, industry experts, faith communities, business, government agencies and parliamentarians. In addition, public opinion research was conducted to solicit and help us understand the views of Canadians – first through 14 focus groups in seven centers across Canada in 2002, followed by a nation-wide telephone survey of more than 1900 Canadians conducted in early 2003. This report highlights what the NWMO heard.

Although these informal discussions were not comprehensive, they did provide us with important insights. With this guidance, the NWMO has sought to integrate the advice and priorities of Canadians into the study plan, engagement plan and overall approach to the NWMO work. We look forward to launching our formal engagement activities upon release of our first discussion document. On behalf of the NWMO, I would like to extend my thanks to all who took the time to meet with us or agreed to share their views through public attitude research. Meeting participants were most generous with offers to provide assistance to the NWMO, and we appreciate greatly the thoughts shared. I wish also to thank the NWMO Advisory Council, whose perspectives and advice have made important contributions to the shaping of our study plan.

Reflecting back on these discussions, I recall the passion and the hope articulated by many who have followed this issue over the years and are anxious to see a safe and responsible course of action adopted for Canada. We were heartened and energized by the desire of many to assist and contribute to the exercise. At the same time, we were made keenly aware of the challenges ahead in engaging Canadians on this issue and advancing an approach which seeks to bridge vastly different views and values held by the Canadian public. We are under no illusions that this will be an easy task.

As we proceed through subsequent phases of our work, it is my sincere intent that the NWMO will continue to reflect the advice that we receive, so that our public engagement, our analysis -- and the way in which we conduct the study itself -- will meet the expectations that Canadians hold for this important work.

Liz Dowdeswell
President, NWMO
November 2003

Putting Used Nuclear Fuel in Context

- Public attitude research revealed that the management of used nuclear fuel is not an issue that many people tend to think about on a daily basis. However, when the topic is raised for discussion, many say they consider it to be very important and are interested in learning more.
- When it is described to them, most Canadians feel that the NWMO's mandate to study and recommend a long term-management approach is an important one.
- In informal conversations across the country, some shared hopes that the NWMO process will lead to a proposed solution and timely government decision on a management approach, rather than simply more public debate on the issue.
- In the absence of a pressing need for a decision, others would prefer more research be conducted before any final decision is made.
- Some registered concern that a resolution on nuclear waste management may enable or encourage the use of nuclear energy in future – for others this was a hope.
- Sharing their perspectives on the broader energy context, some registered preferences for a greater focus on energy conservation and renewable energy over reliance on nuclear generation.

This is important contextual information for the NWMO as we begin to engage Canadians in a dialogue about long-term management approaches.

Involving Canadians

- People would like to see a diversity of perspectives brought to the NWMO study.
- Public attitude research revealed that while a large percentage of people believe that the general public should be involved in the NWMO study, only a small percentage would personally like to be involved. This suggests a challenge for the NWMO in engaging the general public in the dialogue.
- It is not acceptable to most people for the NWMO to consult only engineers and scientists nor is it acceptable for the NWMO to focus only on the general public – both have important contributions to make to the study.
- First and foremost, the involvement of Canadian and international scientists and engineers from the nuclear industry are seen as integral to the NWMO study, to ensure that the most advanced and current thinking is reflected in our work.
- Members of the public expect that the study will seek out expert research and multi-party evaluation in conducting its work.
- Another strong theme that emerged was the importance of involving people from communities with existing nuclear plants; that is, to draw upon the special experiences, insights and perspectives of the people who live and work near nuclear facilities.
- These themes were echoed in individual conversations and we also heard strong support for outreach to some specific communities of interest.
- We were urged to engage aboriginal communities, and to do so at an early point in the study process to integrate perspectives and priorities of traditional knowledge in our work.
- We were reminded that seeking the perspectives of youth will be instrumental in developing our study which will have implications for many future generations to come.

There is agreement that this is an issue about which views should be sought not only from special interest groups, but from the public.

Ensuring a Transparent and Fair Decision-Making Process

- In informal conversations across the country, we heard that the NWMO must earn the public's respect by running a fair and transparent process. We must demonstrate honesty and integrity.
- The study process must be grounded in knowledge and expertise. The assessment of management options must be based on the best science, knowledge, and experience available in Canada and worldwide. People expect Canada to benefit from, and build on, the experiences and learning of other countries on the topic of nuclear waste management.
- We were referred to principles established by Canadian regulatory authorities. Similarly, we were directed to a number of international organizations, such as the Nuclear Energy Association and the International Atomic Energy Agency, to benefit from the vast amount of expertise and research on safe nuclear waste management and the latest available technologies.
- The study analysis must be complete, independent, objective and not unduly influenced by industry or political considerations. Many we met with were interested in the governance structure and role of industry in the NWMO as mandated under the *Nuclear Fuel Waste Act*. At the same time, some questioned an industry-based Board of Directors and whether the organization can be independent of the nuclear industry.
- An active Advisory Council increases confidence among most people. A meaningful role for the Advisory Council was urged.
- Having expert panels to counsel, monitor and report on the study were some mechanisms that people felt would ensure that the study process is appropriate.
- Bringing an environmental voice to the process was raised by many as key.
- Others insisted that balance is required, that is, that all perspectives - from industry, environment, health, business, government, citizens, aboriginal people and others must be brought forward and given equivalent consideration.
- Some were comforted by the significant role of government and regulators in making the final decisions. Others were concerned about the ultimate decision authority residing with government and the associated risk of a process that is open ended --somewhat skeptical that the government would act on the study recommendations.
- There are expectations that the NWMO process will lead to a demonstrated increase in public confidence that used nuclear fuel is being responsibly managed for the long term.
- Some felt that there could be public acceptance of an NWMO recommendation providing that it had been well studied was technically sound, and offered an approach that was secure and safe for the environment and neighbouring communities.

While recognizing that full public acceptance of the NWMO's recommended approach might not be achievable, it was hoped by many that the NWMO would manage with integrity a process that would build confidence.

Bringing the Study Within Reach

- Public attitude research revealed few people felt they knew a lot about used nuclear fuel. The sheer number and complexity of the issues and technical information involved were deterrents to participation for some. People were interested in learning more and receiving information on this issue.
- During our informal conversations we were encouraged to provide factual, neutral baseline information. Provide the facts – and people will form their own opinions. The perspective expressed was the richer the baseline information, the more meaningful the input.
- People wanted to know how we were doing our work and how and when they could get involved. We were asked to communicate openly our workplan and key timelines for decision-making to the public along each step of the way.
- Our focus group research highlighted that there was considerable support for the notion of the NWMO “thinking out loud”. People wanted to observe and follow the thinking through of approaches, and reflect on the research, as it evolves.
- There is interest in contributing to NWMO’s early thinking. People do not want to be brought in at the end of the process to comment on final options.
- We were encouraged to analyze and consult on “bite-sized pieces” along the way. We were advised that consultations should be undertaken in a step-wise process, engaging the public in discussion of carefully scoped issues and material as is appropriate for each phase of the study.
- People need time to think about the issues, and provide informed, thoughtful feedback.
- There is interest in having written discussion documents distributed by the NWMO as a tool for focusing dialogue and discussion within different groups and communities.
- However to avoid “information overload”, we were advised to develop user-friendly documentation, distributed in manageable amounts through the study period.
- Some expressed interest in working with the NWMO to tailor information packages appropriately and assist the NWMO in convening local dialogue with communities and groups.
- People expect that opportunities to participate in these discussions will be communicated widely and regularly. The NWMO was asked to provide ample notice prior to consultations, and opportunities to digest and reflect on NWMO material. Some identified a need to engage experts to help them understand the issues, so they can ask the right questions and participate in a meaningful way.
- The NWMO was reminded that financial support may be required for some interests to participate.

Inviting Canadians to Engage

- The public attitude research revealed support for a variety of innovative and effective methods of engagement. Suggestions to inform and involve participants included the use of newspaper articles and brochures which come to the door, television programs, web-based activities community meetings and open houses.
- Informal conversations revealed some groups favour traditional public meetings/hearings as a forum that enables transparency in discussions as views are tabled and recorded in transcripts. Others recommended consultations, tailored for their own communities.
- The website is accepted as a very important and useful way of reaching out to Canadians across the country. At the same time, we were reminded not to rely exclusively on our

website to get the word out. Not all Canadians have access to, or refer to, the website for information.

- We were urged to seek out expertise in citizen engagement, and defer to professionals to develop and manage sophisticated, two-way dialogue with Canadians.
- In some meetings there was a level of skepticism about the impact that contributions of the public would have. People want to see that they have influenced our process and have had a meaningful impact on the outcome.

Recognizing the Citizens Agenda

- These conversations were not focused on soliciting input on the different management approaches. However, in the course of the informal discussions, many individuals flagged areas of priority that they felt should be addressed in the NWMO study:
 - Safety Health
 - Environmental protection
 - Security, and implications of 9/11
 - Social justice and ethics
 - Preservation of land and natural resources that support livelihoods
 - Impact on and involvement of Canada's aboriginal peoples
 - Socio-economic impacts of hosting a waste management facility, including spin-offs on local jobs and economic benefits, and the perception of 'bribing' a community
 - Transportation and risks in moving used nuclear fuel
 - Financial requirements and economic implications, provisions for ensuring adequacy of funds to finance nuclear waste management
 - Available expertise and capabilities to develop and manage facilities
 - Scope for "recycling" used nuclear fuel, to reduce the amount of waste
 - Scope for retrieving fuel or adopting a different management approach in future.
- We were reminded about existing programs and initiatives on nuclear waste, and that we should not confuse or overburden people. At the same time some felt that the NWMO should consider other nuclear waste streams that might also require long-term care.
- A diversity of views was offered on the different management approaches – a continual reminder to the NWMO that achieving consensus would require significant effort. We also heard that there is no one correct analytical framework by which to compare options. The framework for Canadians must be developed through broad consultation if it is to reflect accurately the values and perspectives of society.