

GNWT to pursue court appeal

Education authority and French school board say message from the public has been heard loud and clear



Terence Courtoreille, chairperson of the Hay River District Education Authority, speaks at a public consultation meeting March 4 at Princess Alexandra school.

by Sarah Ladik
Northern News Services
Hay River

The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment has received notices from both the Hay River District Education Authority (DEA) and Commission scolaire francophone (CSF) reporting the result of public meetings has been a resounding "no" to a proposed school swap.

"We learned that both the commission and the DEA do not accept to continue discussion (with regards to a school swap) and we accept that decision," deputy minister of education Gabriela Eggenhofer told *The Hay River Hub* last week.

"The Department of Justice is now focusing on presenting our case in court March 24 through 26."

Education, Culture, and Employment had proposed an

exchange between facilities at Harry Camsell School and Ecole Boreale in Hay River to satisfy a 2012 court ruling granting both schools under the CSF greater access to services, such as a gym, shop, and home economics classroom.

Both boards consulted Hay River residents two weeks ago with a similar response – namely that the government needs to step up and provide the facilities required at Ecole Boreale instead of spending money and time in the court system.

"We've been engaged in this process since mid-August," said Eggenhofer. "Both parties have been extremely collaborative and generous with their time and we had some very open and frank discussions."

She said she had been surprised at the response from the community, as the DEA and

CSF's reactions had originally been more positive about the idea.

Both groups, however, have maintained that they are guided by the parents and residents they serve.

"The HRDEA obviously had concerns with the proposed MOU going into our community consultation meeting March 4th, and feedback from parents confirmed the (Hay River District Education Authority) was headed in the right direction," said education authority chairperson Terence Courtoreille. "As a result, the (education authority) voted unanimously to not sign the proposed MOU."

The letter sent by the district education authority to the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment March 5, the day following the public consultation, stated as much. It said

that while the board trusts that a viable solution can be found, the authority cannot support a school swap.

"As per current practice, our stance does not eliminate our continued desire and willingness to continue to be good neighbours and engage in continuing partnership arrangements of mutual benefit with the Commission scolaire and its school administration and staff at Ecole Boreale," the letter reads.

Eggenhofer said the matter now rests with the Department of Justice. The appeal will be heard in Yellowknife March 24 through 26 but a ruling will not likely be swiftly forthcoming.

"We will await the decision made by the court," she said. "There's no guarantee for when it will come, but we are speculating it could take between five and eight months."

Meetings spark fracking dialogue

Fort Nelson First Nation leaders provide reality check for Sahtu residents

by Laura Busch
Northern News Services
Sahtu

Sahtu residents have it pretty good.

This was one of the main arguments presented during three community meetings in Tulita, Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope earlier this month from Fort Nelson First Nation Chief Sharleen Gale and lands and resources director Lana Lowe.

The pair were in the region to talk about their experiences with hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, and the cumulative impacts of development on their traditional land.

"The point was to foster a conversation between Dene peoples sharing experiences with accumulative impacts of shale oil and gas exploration on their territories," said Shauna Morgan of the Pembina Institute, which organized

the speaking tour. "People talk a lot about cumulative impacts, but it's often seen as this technical thing that's too complicated for ordinary people to understand. So, the point was to hear about cumulative impacts through stories of real experiences as opposed to computer models."

Sahtu Renewable Resource Board (SRRB) executive director Deborah Simmons attended the March 3 meeting in Tulita, which she said was very well attended by about 45 residents.

"They were super engaged," she said of the audience. "I think they were so appreciative to have a dialogue with other First Nations people who have experienced fracking first hand."

In explaining their experience working with the industry groups developing shale

gas on their traditional lands, Gale – who has been given a mandate by her membership to support fracking activities but in a sustainable way – somewhat scolded the people of the Sahtu for failing to take advantage of the tools at their disposal to control how development happens in their region.

"It was made clear that there are many differences between what's happening in the Sahtu and in B.C.," said Simmons. "(In B.C.) it's shale gas, not shale oil. There there's no land claim and we have a land claim."

"I think the people in Tulita who were listening to that story were hugely inspired," she said. "I think they have begun to realize that if they take a strong responsibility and they take action about being involved in research and monitoring, they're going to

be much better positioned to provide strong input into the decisions that will be made in the coming months and years."

Morgan agreed that the sessions fostered many productive discussions.

"Most of all, I think people in Sahtu communities realized how many tools they already have through their land claim to manage their land and their territory in comparison to the tools available to the Fort Nelson First Nation," she said. "But they heard how proactive Fort Nelson First Nation has been in getting out there and monitoring and asserting that there should be more limits and controls placed on development."

School talks cancelled

Although the original plan included Gale and Lowe visiting schools in Tulita and Norman Wells (Chief T'Selehye School in Fort Good Hope was

on March Break at the time), those presentations were cancelled.

News/North could not confirm by press time exactly why the plug was pulled on the school presentations.

"My analysis is that the government and everybody else in the Sahtu are extremely aware of how volatile and extreme the situation is right now," said Simmons of fracking. "There's a concern to ensure that the students get a well-balanced education for sure."

The SRRB looks forward to working with the Sahtu Divisional Education Council and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in the future to ensure students are exposed to all sides of the development debate and are given the tools they need to become critical thinkers, she added.

In general, the knowledge exchange between the two

Dene cultures was a productive one whose impact was seen in a larger than normal turnout for a subsequent fracking information session in Tulita sponsored by the Sahtu Land and Water Board, where roughly 25 people attended.

"That's a remarkably big turnout for that type of meeting," said Simmons.

"To me, that was a huge sign that this kind of dialogue needs to continue happening. People need to continue learning about what's involved in this kind of development."

"It doesn't matter which side of the fence you're on. The region has been becoming increasingly polarized, I think, and I think that kind of event brought people together in that people realized it's not about being for or against fracking, it's about understanding this very complex situation we're in the middle of."

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