

Questions about Fracking in the Sahtu
CBC Special Report, Thursday, October 24, 2013, 7:40 a.m.

LOREN MCGINNIS, CBC: We've been talking a lot about fracking on the program. This winter ConocoPhillips plans to frack two exploratory wells in the Sahtu. It will be a first for the oil industry in that region. People living in the Sahtu still have questions about the practice, as I heard the last time I spoke with the chief of Fort Good Hope. Here's what Greg Laboucan told me a couple of weeks ago when he came back from a fracking tour in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. That was early October.

LABOUCAN: Just thinking of my community, the majority are still afraid of the development just because we don't know just what process they are going to be using. Is it similar to what they're using down south or down in North Dakota. You know, we haven't seen the geological layout of how deep our aquifers go in regards to fresh water underneath and spilling into our Mackenzie River as our water source. So we need to feel very confident that it's not going to be affected by any of these chemicals. Industry and government needs to prove every step they're taking to mitigate any contamination. I know there will be contamination, but to mitigate it to the point where our land and water will not be affected to the point where it's going to affect our future.

CBC: That was chief of Fort Good Hope, Greg Laboucan, talking about some of the questions people in his community have about fracking. Tuesday people in Fort Good Hope had a chance to put some of their questions to ConocoPhillips, the Sahtu Land and Water Board and a group called the Indian Resource Council. Joe Grandjambe was there and I spoke with him yesterday about what the meeting was like. I started by asking him what he was hoping to get out of the meeting.

GRANDJAMBE: At least the community people were expecting to see if baseline data would be done before work progresses. The other was why our leaders weren't passing information on to us so we could make a proper decision as a whole community.

CBC: What did you hear, what came up at the meeting?

GRANDJAMBE: The meeting was more of selling us an idea. The idea of a joint venture with a bid on contracts and get contracts and work-related kind of meeting and not very much fracking information came out, which is what we were interested in because as of today all of the information is from the internet and the focus wasn't on fracking until the individuals in the community started asking why this happened in Norman Wells without proper consultation.

CBC: Walk me through people's concerns that you heard, once people were able to ask their questions, what were they saying?

GRANDJAMBE: We have questions regarding casing and chemical migration and environmental damages that we don't have baseline data on. Then we also talked about the amount of water the proponents use to do a well.

CBC: In a fracking operation.

GRANDJAMBE: Yes and the information we gathered it's 2.5 to at least 5 million gallons of water per well and the way it was presented last evening was that they use the barrels of water, which makes it seem like you're not using much.

CBC: Do you feel like people then got their chance to have their voices heard to bring up the things they're concerned about?

GRANDJAMBE: Not completely. There was just a few of us that were given a chance to speak. Some of the individuals that came to the meeting all prepared and did their research on fracking weren't heard at all. In fact they were passed over to other people that seemed more likely pro-development. The community is not anti-development or that, but it's trying to do work on the principles that we always operate under and that's protecting the people and its environment.

CBC: I want to go back to that point you made, there were people there who wanted to voice concerns who were unable to do that. Is that what you're saying?

GRANDJAMBE: Yes, and some of the questions that were asked weren't answered. Former long serving Chief Frank T'Seleie asked a question, but it was never answered and those were questions on the environment and the data collection and it was never answered.

CBC: They say this is just a couple of test wells and that this is what is needed to decide of an actual project is worth doing and that an actual project, if something is to go ahead, it would get a full environmental review. What's your reaction to that?

GRANDJAMBE: That's the idea they've been trying to sell to us. If fracking had took place all the data collected would be contaminated data. All we're asking for is that data be collected before any activity takes place, before any fracking takes place, and that's not much to ask for because then you would have true data collection.

CBC: That baseline you were talking about?

GRANDJAMBE: A baseline.

CBC: The Indian Resource Council was there. What did you learn about who they are and what did they have to say about the project?

GRANDJAMBE: I don't think they realize that we were the first small community in Canada that had a joint venture with BP Canada and Chevron Canada and we negotiated all the work, the employment, the contracts and how things would be distributed. So we've been there before so it's nothing new to us. It's not what we were asking for. It was the environmental impact of fracking that the community was more interested in.

CBC: Joe, thank you very much for giving us your perspective on this. I really appreciate it.

GRANDJAMBE: And at this time too I'd also like to say thank you to Mr. Bromley, individuals in the community don't know who he is, but he was the only one that stood up for the community and I'd like to say thank you.

CBC: Okay, well hopefully he's tuned in. I appreciate that, Joe. Thank you very much, again, for your perspective.

GRANDJAMBE: Thank you very much for the time.

CBC: That was my conversation yesterday with Joe Grandjambe of Fort Good Hope. He was disappointed in a community meeting that was held on fracking there on Tuesday. As you heard he gave a little shout out to Weledeh MLA Bob Bromley, who also questioned the purpose of the meetings in the Legislature this week.

CKLB Radio, Thursday, October 24, 2013, 8:30 a.m.

ANDREW MILLICHAMP, CKLB: In order for the traditional knowledge experts and elders to pipe into the fracking discussions going on in the Sahtu, the conversation needs to be translated into North Slavey. The terminology is new, scientific and very technical and the job is left up to translators like Dora Grandjambe.

GRANDJAMBE: Anytime that I interpret for the elders I always do get feedback because when different projects and things come up like for one of the lands people that are updated on anything.

CKLB: She's had to sit down with industry personnel to learn in-depth knowledge on fracking. This is the only way she could translate such complicated information into Slavey because North Slavey doesn't have a word for fracking.

GRANDJAMBE: There's no word for it. What you would have to do is give the description, like the process, how it works and everything else, like how they would do the fracking.

CKLB: More fracking discussions are scheduled this week in the Sahtu.

