

Minister
of Natural Resources



Ministre
des Ressources naturelles

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E4

March 22, 2021

Mr. John Jackson
Nuclear Waste Watch
nuclearwastewatch@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Jackson and Co-signatories:

Thank you for your correspondence of February 8, 2021, conveying the expectations of a number of public interest groups regarding Canada's review of the radioactive waste policy and waste management strategies. I would also like to express my appreciation to those of you who participated in the roundtable discussion with me on February 25, 2021. I appreciated hearing your views and perspectives on modernizing Canada's radioactive waste policy.

Protecting the health and safety of Canadians and the environment is the Government's top priority when it comes to nuclear energy. This includes ensuring that all radioactive waste in Canada is managed safely for generations to come. Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) launched an open and transparent public engagement process in November 2020 to modernize Canada's policy for the management of radioactive waste, and it is committed to hearing Canadians' views on what should be included in a modernized radioactive waste policy. Our goal is to inform a modernized policy that continues to reflect international practices in the area of radioactive waste management, the best available science, and the values and principles of Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples.

Given the unprecedented times we are in, we are engaging virtually to protect the health and safety of all participants while still offering opportunities for broad engagement. To achieve this, we have launched a virtual engagement hub, where information and updates on our policy review, as well as opportunities to participate in virtual dialogues and provide written input, are available. We are also engaging through virtual meetings and roundtables accessible by both internet and telephone.

With respect to timelines, I have heard your concerns and have decided to extend the deadline for comments on the discussion papers to May 31, 2021. Our engagement on the radioactive waste policy does not end there. Following engagement on the discussion papers, a "What We Heard" report and draft policy will be released for public comment. I have instructed my officials to ensure there is sufficient time, following the release of the report, for meaningful feedback from your organizations, Canadians, and Indigenous Peoples.

Canada

Going into the engagement process, core values and principles were identified, which must be part of the new forward-looking, modernized radioactive waste policy. These principles align with those you have suggested and include the safety of people and the environment, openness, transparency and public consultation, and Indigenous reconciliation. From policy and regulatory development to project reviews, making government information available to Canadians transparently for public consumption is a priority. Given our commitment to transparency, information we receive through our public discussion forums, online forms, and formal submissions will be made available on the [virtual engagement hub website](#).

At the outset of the engagement process, my officials engaged broadly with a wide array of stakeholders and Indigenous groups to hear first-hand how all groups would like to be engaged as part of the policy review process. Since the launch of the policy review on November 16, 2020, NRCan has held numerous bilateral meetings with non-governmental organizations and interested citizens, as well as an information session with more than 55 attendees. The first of four roundtable sessions with Nuclear Waste Watch was also held on March 4, 2021. My officials continue to work closely with the Nuclear Waste Watch Steering Committee to co-develop three additional engagement roundtables with their members, which will take place prior to May 31, 2021. Additional roundtables will be held within the same period to hear from other interested citizens and groups. NRCan is continuing to meet with Indigenous Peoples, non-governmental organizations, municipalities, provinces, industry, youth organizations, and academia to seek their input, and it will continue to do so.

No relationship is more important to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples, which, like any relationship, requires an ongoing and sustained commitment. The Government of Canada is deeply committed to advancing reconciliation and renewing the relationship with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership. Since the November 2020 launch of the engagement process, NRCan officials have reached out to over 40 Indigenous communities, organizations, and councils and held bilateral meetings to determine the best approach for engagement to facilitate participation. We will continue to engage virtually with Indigenous Peoples through roundtables and bilateral meetings.

Steps have been taken to incorporate feedback received to date, including ensuring that NRCan works in close collaboration with other government departments that also play a leadership role in the management of radioactive waste. While NRCan is leading the policy review, we are working in close collaboration with officials from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Health Canada, and Global Affairs Canada. At your request, these departments and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission will be attending engagement sessions to hear views and perspectives first-hand.

Complementing the Government of Canada's process, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), which is responsible for implementing Canada's current plan for nuclear fuel waste, has been asked to work with waste owners and engage Canadians to develop a comprehensive integrated strategy to address all categories of radioactive waste. As Minister of Natural Resources, I asked the NWMO to lead the dialogue and develop an integrated strategy for radioactive waste, which would then be submitted to me for consideration. The Integrated Strategy must be defined by waste producers and owners who have the best understanding of their waste and priorities. However, the strategy must also be prepared in a collaborative manner involving all waste producers and owners as well as government, Indigenous Peoples, and interested Canadians. The NWMO has been instructed to ensure that the strategy takes into account any new direction set out by the Government of Canada's radioactive waste policy review. I encourage you to participate in the NWMO process when it does launch so that your views and perspective can be incorporated into the strategy before it is submitted for my consideration. Following receipt of the integrated strategy from NWMO, I will confer with my colleagues on the next steps.

We look forward to continuing to engage with you, organizations that have a critical role in shaping Canada's radioactive waste policy, and we are particularly interested in hearing what you would like to see in a modernized radioactive waste policy.

Again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seamus O'Regan Jr.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Honourable Seamus O'Regan Jr., P.C., M.P.