

Responsible Action – Citizens’ Dialogue on the Long-term Management of Used Nuclear Fuel

Backgrounder #2

The Dialogue Process

Prior to the dialogue, participants received a letter explaining the dialogue process and brief background information on used nuclear fuel and the role of NWMO. On arrival at the dialogue session, they received the workbook with additional factual information about this issue and the two sets of scenarios to consider as a starting point for their discussions. A pre- and post-dialogue questionnaire asking citizens to rate each of the scenarios was also provided.

At the beginning of the day, two professional facilitators reviewed the factual information in the workbook and screened a short NWMO video. Information provided to participants included a brief overview of current management approaches to used nuclear fuel in Canada and in other countries, the various technical methods currently being explored around the world, and the mandate of NWMO. This information was supplemented by a description of the mandates of other relevant organizations involved with the management and regulation of used nuclear fuel, wall charts and photos of current storage facilities.

Following this orientation, citizens had an opportunity to ask questions. Many of them were facing this issue for the first time and there were many questions. Often the facilitators could address the questions, but on occasion clarification or explanation was required. In these circumstances the questions of a technical nature were noted and referred to CPRN and the NWMO for follow-up. Answers were provided to the group as soon as possible.¹

Participants then introduced themselves to the group, and described a key issue or concern with respect to used nuclear fuel.

The facilitators proceeded to review the two sets of scenarios presented in the workbook as a starting point for the dialogue. Citizens completed the pre-dialogue questionnaire rating their level of agreement with each scenario statement on a scale of one to seven.

After reviewing the rules of dialogue and the difference between dialogue and debate, participants worked in smaller, self-managed groups to answer the question “What

¹ After the first three dialogues, some adjustments were made to the question and answer part of the session, so that the dialogue could be focused on societal values, and not become sidetracked into bilateral question and answer sessions.

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characteristics do we most want to see in a long-term approach to managing used nuclear fuel?” These groups were designed to be as reflective as possible of the demographic and attitudinal profile of the broader group.

Later in plenary, each group reported on the results of its discussion. The whole group, with the support of the facilitators, then deliberated together to identify the similarities and differences across their reports. The similarities were tested by the facilitators to ensure they represented common ground - areas of agreement across a broad majority of the group. The common ground became their own vision of the high level characteristics they wanted to see in a long-term approach to managing used nuclear fuel.

In the afternoon, using the same process, the small groups were asked to expand on the vision they had created by answering the following question: “What choices are we prepared to make to move toward the kind of approach we want?” After reporting back from their small group discussions, the larger group again identified the common ground, elaborating on their vision from the morning and exploring some of the choices and tradeoffs they would be prepared to make. Again, the facilitators reviewed the similarities with participants, to ensure they had accurately captured the common ground.

At the end of the day, participants were again asked to rate each of the four scenarios. This time, they were given the opportunity to attach conditions to their ratings and 350 participants (76%) attached at least one condition. They were also asked to rate their level of agreement with the vision they had developed earlier in the day. In addition, they were asked to complete an evaluation of the session itself. To conclude the dialogue, each participant had the opportunity to state their insight from the day and offer one piece of advice to decision makers. The vast majority of participants chose to make this closing comment.

The common ground identified by citizens was reinforced by the other data sources, including the pre and post questionnaire ratings, the conditions they imposed on their ratings, and the opening and closing comments. CPRN analyzed all of this data to inform this report.