

Committee opts to delay decision on deep- water wells

Recommendation to keep moratorium in place shirks responsibility on issue

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The recommendation from a legislature standing committee that the moratorium on deepwater wells should remain in place while further investigation and public hearings continue, leaves more questions than answers. The key issue remains unresolved and the committee seems befuddled on what to do next.

The request from the P. E. I. Potato Board to lift the 10- year moratorium on deep- water wells has resulted in months of intense debate, letter writing and opinion submissions. The committee held lengthy hearings where individuals and groups, both for and against, were passionate in presenting viewpoints and arguments.

But there is no information from the committee about additional hearings. There is no timeline for an answer. Such an important question requires action or at least a plan. Instead, the committee presented a stopgap recommendation. It seems the committee is anxious to put the controversial question aside and is reluctant to deal with the issue.

If the committee cannot produce an answer, then perhaps it's time to assemble an independent commission to review submissions, analyze the best data available and deliver a scientifically supported recommendation.

Members of the public had packed the committee hearings in almost unprecedented numbers. They want an answer as well. Instead the committee is suggesting that government develop a Water Act. Such legislation is long overdue, but also raises the questions: Will this further delay an answer on wells or is this a completely separate issue? A Water Act should give direction on how we use and protect our water supply but it could also derail the whole deepwater well issue for a year or even longer.

At some point, we have to make a decision and it better be the right one. If the issue is too complex for committee members to handle, let the science talk. Is there sufficient groundwater to supply additional deep- water wells and is there sufficient recharge to replenish the water used? Environment data indicates the answers to both are yes. Many have called for a review of that data. An independent commission can provide that.