

Muskrat Falls Inquiry hearings finish in Labrador

Ashley Fitzpatrick (ashley.fitzpatrick@thetelegram.com)

Published: 16 hours ago

Updated: 7 hours ago



After adjourning the final hearing for the Muskrat Falls Inquiry at the Lawrence O'Brien Arts Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay on Thursday, Commissioner Richard LeBlanc took time to personally thank staff and the sheriff's officers assigned for their work. LeBlanc has until Dec. 12 to file his final report. - Ashley Fitzpatrick

Commissioner Richard LeBlanc says final report is due by Dec. 12

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, N.L. — Commissioner Richard LeBlanc took a moment before adjourning the final day of hearings for the Muskrat Falls Inquiry to thank everyone involved, one last time. Then he briefly reflected on the road ahead.

The inquiry has heard from 134 witnesses before final submissions this week in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. A few more documents were entered into evidence during the week, with the final count at more than 4,600 individual documents available to the Commissioner in putting together his final report.

"I have a substantial amount of work to do, but at this particular point in time there's nothing that indicates that I won't get it done in time," LeBlanc said.

He has a slightly tighter deadline than he originally thought, learning the report will have to be finished, edited and to the Queen's Printer by Dec. 12, if it is to be printed in time for the final submission to Natural Resources Minister Siobhan Coady, by Dec. 31.

"So I have a large amount of work to do in a relatively short period of time and the pressure's on. I'm certainly feeling it," he said, while adding he doesn't have a problem with the due date.

LeBlanc's final piece of business was to take in final submissions from all parties involved. On Thursday, that included closing comments from Liam O'Brien on behalf of Newfoundland Power and Peter O'Flaherty, on behalf of Dwight Ball and Siobhan Coady, with Nalcor Energy lawyer Dan Simmons opting for brief rebuttal on a few points raised in these and earlier submissions. The Telegram will note some takeaways from the final submissions in The Weekend edition.

Leblanc posed questions and made comments as the final submissions were being made. However, Concerned Citizens' Coalition lawyer Geoff Budden says it's a good idea to err on the side of caution when it comes to taking away conclusions from judges' questioning.

"Sometimes obviously they're throwing ideas out to see how counsel respond, perhaps confirming their own thinking, perhaps giving the person opportunity to respond to an idea somebody else has raised," he said, at the end of the final hearing. "So I guess the takeaway is I wouldn't take anything away."

It's now a wait-and-see for the final report.

As the session was adjourned, lawyers shook hands and papers were packed up. Members of the Labrador Land Protectors and Grand Riverkeeper Labrador – some of the few, consistent members of the audience at the inquiry hearings – left the auditorium and spoke with each other briefly in the lobby of the Lawrence O'Brien Arts Centre, far less animated.

Roberta Benefiel is not only a member of the groups with standing at the inquiry, but also testified during the public hearings. She emphasized the objections to the project, and ongoing concerns including as to the stability of the North Spur and methylmercury production levels in the reservoir. The organizations simply do not trust the information issued to date by the province and Nalcor Energy.

"I can't say the feelings are changed," she said, emphasizing the lack of trust.

At the same time, she is interested to see what comes in LeBlanc's final report.

"I hope his recommendations will be favourable to what we have asked and what others have asked," she added.

Time and again in final submissions, Premier Ball, Minister Coady and the Liberal government were given credit for calling the public inquiry.

On Wednesday, Consumer Advocate Dennis Browne repeated his criticisms when it comes to the Muskrat Falls development. But he also said the inquiry has offered a level of understanding of the project that wasn't generally available before.

"It's been an open, transparent, fair process for everyone who participated. Information that came out through the inquiry was not known to the public. It is out there now," he said.

He has to now pivot focus to the ongoing work at the Public Utilities Board, beginning to settle how the now-\$12.7-billion project will be paid for. That process is considering different power rate mitigation options, with separate public hearings in the fall.

ashley.fitzpatrick@thetelegram.com

RELATED

- [The Muskrat Falls Inquiry \(Phase I\)](#)
- [The Muskrat Falls Inquiry \(Phase II\)](#)
- [The Muskrat Falls Inquiry \(Phase III\)](#)