

# NOFRAC

Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Coalition

## THE PROVINCE of NOVA SCOTIA - DALHOUSIE AGREEMENT (SERDIP) TO DEVELOP ONSHORE GAS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

March 2026

### Introduction:

In December 2025, the Houston Government announced they were allocating \$30 million in hopes of kickstarting onshore gas development in Nova Scotia. An agreement would be signed with Dalhousie University to administer a Subsurface Energy R&D Investment Program (SERDIP.) The program follows the Houston government's decision that Nova Scotia's economic future should be based on resource extraction including fossil fuels, and its repeal of Nova Scotia's 2014 ban on hydraulic fracturing in March 2025.

The SERDIP program is deeply problematic in its fundamental intent, to start a fracked gas industry in Nova Scotia at a time when fracked gas is a known major contributor to climate change and a well-documented risk to human health, clean water resources, and community wellbeing. In 2026, the scientific evidence of the dangers of fracking for gas is stronger than ever. Recognized risks continue to be confirmed, not solved. The Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Committee (NOFRAC) has analyzed the Agreement between the Province and Dalhousie and found that many provisions of the Agreement are also deeply problematic. NOFRAC outlines the main issues of concern in this document, *The Province of Nova Scotia-Dalhousie Agreement (SERDIP) to Develop Onshore Gas: What you Need to Know*.

### Key Facts

1. The Houston government is funding a \$30 million project with the goal of kickstarting an onshore gas industry on a hyper-accelerated 11-month schedule. The Province has contracted Dalhousie University to administer the program. \$24 million is earmarked for subsidies to fossil-fuel companies, including up to 100% of exploration costs.
2. The agreement makes clear that hydraulic fracturing (fracking) would be involved if an onshore gas industry develops in Nova Scotia.<sup>1</sup> Exploratory wells under the program would likely be fracked.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Specific mention of hydraulic fracturing is made in the research project study descriptions relating to Groundwater/ Wastewater (Appendix 1, Section A, p. 23) and Seismic Analysis (Appendix 1, Section A, p. 24).

<sup>2</sup> "The Program will offer financial investments to operators to explore Nova Scotia's petroleum potential as part of a controlled research initiative. This work will advance scientific understanding of subsurface geology, new energy potential in geothermal or carbon capture utilization and storage **and modern drilling and stimulation technologies applied in the Nova Scotia environment.**" [Schedule A, Program Overview, p.16.] NB "Stimulation" in this context is another word for fracking.

3. Dalhousie must carry out its duties “under the direction of the Province” and the Province’s representative, the Executive Director of the Energy Resources Division of the Department of Energy (DoE). [*SERDIP Section 1.4*]
4. Dalhousie does not have an independent voice. “*Dalhousie shall ensure that any press releases, other public communications, or public communications plans are approved by the Province prior to being released or implemented.*” [11.2]
5. The Province will own and control all information including data, working papers, evaluation and research. [6.1, 6.2] The Province, not Dalhousie, will decide what information will be released to the public. The Province alone will decide what information is withheld from the public. [6.3] The agreement includes the right to destroy documents and to “erase [material] irrevocably,” [4.4, 6.3] including the results of research. These clauses conflict with transparency, the public’s right to know, and academic freedom.
6. The Parties “agree any information received by one party from the other should be clearly designated in writing as “CONFIDENTIAL” [4.1] and that all materials including research reports and data are “Confidential Information of the Province.” [6.2]
7. Dalhousie plays a number of roles in the program, including setting up a governance structure for the project, setting qualification criteria for participating fossil fuel companies, screening and confirming qualified companies, hiring researchers, conducting research and leading stakeholder and First Nation engagement.
8. Six research projects will take place during the exploratory stage: geology, water & wastewater, methane emissions, seismic (earthquakes), transportation and infrastructure and health. [*Schedule A, Appendix 1, pp 23-26*]. Some studies will gather geological or baseline information. An additional study will analyze results of exploratory drilling. Studies will be carried out over the 3 - 4 month exploratory phase. Dalhousie will submit a final report in December 2026.
9. The purpose of each contracted research study is either “to inform exploration decisions” or “to inform future policy development. The research projects are not designed to weigh risks vs. benefits of an onshore fracked gas industry. They will not evaluate whether exploration and extraction of fracked gas should proceed.
10. Study goals include “creating community readiness,” “preparing communities for potential energy development” and “building public confidence.” For example, the description of the “Community Health Impact Study” does not include any evaluation of potential community health impacts from an onshore fracked gas industry. The “study” summary includes developing information to “help patients and caregivers understand monitoring data and how to raise concerns with primary care” and “prepare[s] communities for potential energy production by strengthening health literacy.” [*Appendix 1, Schedule A, p. 25*]
11. The Horton Bluff formation in the Windsor-Kennetcook Basin is the only geological area mentioned by name. [*Schedule A, Appendix 1, Geological Studies*]
12. An Oversight Committee and a Technical Oversight committee make up the main governance structure of the project. [*Schedule A, 7, p. 21*] Provincial Department of

Energy representatives and Dalhousie administrators sit on both committees, as well as one industry representative. The Oversight Committee of 9+ members includes one position for a First Nations representative and one position for a community representative. [Schedule A, Section 7, p. 21] The Agreement contains minimal information about the roles of these committees, and no information as to how members will be selected.

13. The Agreement gives Dalhousie responsibility for First Nations engagement [Schedule A, Phase 2, p 19], while noting the Province is responsible for “Ongoing Section 35 consultations with First Nations by the Province (if required).” [Schedule A, Phase 4, p 19]. The Agreement does not recognize the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi’kmaq Chiefs’ 2014 stated opposition to fracking, reaffirmed in 2025.
14. The one-year project timeline includes these and other points:
  - March-April:** Calls for Proposals and outreach to exploration companies. Stakeholder and First Nations engagement begins
  - May:** Exploration Agreements granted to “successful proponents,” “Section 35 consultations with First Nations by the Province (if required.)”
  - May-July:**
    - Compliance with regulatory requirements **which may include:**
      - Detailed subsurface data review
      - Environmental studies
      - Site selection and validation
    - Final drill targets and sites confirmed
    - Ongoing Section 35 consultations with First Nations by the Province (if required)
  - July – October:** Site preparation, initial drilling and exploration
  - December 31, 2026:** Dalhousie compiles Final Report and identifies papers for publication. (Schedule A, Section 5, p.18) Province makes selected parts of final report public. **Full report is not made public.** (Schedule A, Phase 6, p. 20)
15. An absence of “interest from industry” will not end the program. If the call for proposals does not generate interest, Dalhousie is responsible to review the process, including meeting with industry representatives, and develop and reach agreement with the Province on a revised path forward. (Schedule A, Section 5, Phase 2).

## Many reasons for concern:

### **RED FLAG 1: Province has full control of information and public statements**

The Province, not Dalhousie, has full control of information, including deciding what information will be made public and what information will not be public. The province must pre-approve any statements by Dalhousie. Given these conditions, Dalhousie’s role in public engagement and research cannot be considered objective or unbiased. Research conclusions will be highly suspect.

### **RED FLAG 2: Destruction of information**

The agreement includes a clause stating that all parties agree to return, destroy **or irrevocably erase** confidential documents and material after receiving a written request. [4.4, p. 5] There is no limit on this clause. It appears that this clause would allow destruction and irrevocable erasure of any information, including information that might be used to establish liability for harm

caused by activities carried out under the agreement. This clause appears to be in violation of existing law. It raises serious questions as to the Province's commitment to its overriding duty to the public interest.

### **RED FLAG 3: Limited ability to correct misinformation**

The inclusion of strict confidentiality clauses combined with clauses giving the Province full ownership of all information could lead to a situation where statements could be made by the Province or other parties that contradict, misrepresent or mislead the public in relation to information collected by Dalhousie participants, while restricting the right of Dalhousie participants to publicly set the record straight.

### **RED FLAG 4: No commitment to transparency**

The lack of commitment to transparency means that important information will not be available to the public in a timely way and may never be available. Most of what is known about past fracking in the Kennetcook area of Nova Scotia comes from documents accessed through Freedom of Information requests.<sup>3</sup> Although Dalhousie made a public commitment to transparency in January 2026, the Agreement does not allow Dalhousie to act on that commitment unless the Province agrees.

### **RED FLAG 5: Community participation and informed consent are absent**

There are no meaningful opportunities for public analysis and input, and no value given to public participation or local knowledge. There is no recognition of the importance of community consent, social license or informed consent in the Agreement, although these were key recommendations of the *Nova Scotia Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing (2014)*.<sup>4</sup>

The "public communication strategy" set out in the Agreement is top-down. The strategy will be designed jointly by the Province and Dalhousie [11.1] with a public relations firm hired to assist with stakeholder outreach. [Schedule A, 6 a].

The repeated aims of "creating community readiness", "preparing communities" and "building public confidence" indicate that the goals of public communication and community engagement are not to determine whether there is social license for a fracked gas industry, but to sooth public concerns and encourage community buy-in.

### **Red Flag 6: First Nations opposition to fracking ignored**

The Program was developed and the Agreement has been signed despite the opposition of the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs to hydraulic fracturing. On March 28, 2025, the Assembly reaffirmed a resolution passed in 2014 stating that, "the Assembly of Nova Scotia does not support any hydraulic fracturing activity in Nova Scotia and will continue to oppose any and all hydraulic fracturing activity until such time all environmental concerns have been

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<sup>3</sup> Documents received through Freedom of Information requests (FOIPOP) relating to Triangle Petroleum's activities in the Kennetcook-Noel area in 2007-8 revealed important information about the chemical composition of the fracking fluids used, the high levels of NORMS (Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials) found in fracking flowback wastewater, and the fact that in one fracked well, 85% of injected chemical laden fracking fluids never returned above ground. FOIPOPed documents also revealed the scope of Triangle Petroleum's development plan, where Phase 1 involved drilling and fracking 210 wells, served by 5 compressor stations and multiple pipelines in a 35 square kilometer area, while the larger plan included development of 620 wells in the area from Windsor to Wolfville. Additional information in *Out of Control : Nova Scotia's Experience with Fracking for Shale Gas, 2013*.

<sup>4</sup> *Nova Scotia Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing (2014)*, Executive Summary, pp. 4-5

addressed adequately with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.”<sup>5</sup> The position of the Assembly on hydraulic fracturing has been communicated repeatedly to Premier Houston.

### **RED FLAG 7; Studies support predetermined conclusions**

The study outlines appear designed to support two main predetermined conclusions: a) that onshore gas should and will be developed in Nova Scotia and b) that the risk is minimal, manageable or acceptable. These conclusions have been reached even before local information has been gathered and evaluated, and without considering the overwhelming balance of scientific evidence on multiple risks and harms of the unconventional fracked gas industry.

The studies are designed to either “inform exploration decisions” or to “inform future policy development.” Additional goals include “creating community readiness,” “preparing communities for potential energy development” and “building public confidence.”

### **RED FLAG 8: Toxic wastewater disposal remains unresolved risk**

Disposal of millions of gallons of highly contaminated fracking wastewater is one of the significant unresolved challenges of the fracked gas industry. The Agreement greatly oversimplifies the problem, stating that research would determine “how to safely handle, treat ... flowback and produced water, which is created during drilling and hydraulic fracturing” and conduct “proactive planning for wastewater management.” This raises a number of red flags.

- a) In the past, Nova Scotia adopted and followed a policy prohibiting underground disposal of fracking wastewater due to risks to groundwater related to local geology. There is no mention of whether this policy will be applied to wastewater generated by explorations carried out as part of this Program. There are indications that underground wastewater disposal may be allowed.<sup>6</sup>
- b) There is no mention of the need for attention to elevated levels of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORMS) in fracking wastewater in Nova Scotia.<sup>7</sup> Elevated levels of NORMS increase health and environmental risks, making handling and disposal more expensive and challenging.
- c) Underground injection of fracking wastewater has multiple risks, including risks of contamination of aquifers. Recently disclosed documents<sup>8</sup> show that for decades, the US

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<sup>5</sup> “We have made it clear to the Premier that the Mi'kmaq have always opposed hydraulic fracturing and that there has been no meaningful consultation on provincial decisions to reverse bans on hydraulic fracturing,” said Chief Michelle Glasgow, Co-Lead of Health, Wellbeing and Elders portfolio for the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs. Today [March 28, 2025], the Assembly met and reaffirmed a resolution passed in 2014 which stated that, “the Assembly of Nova Scotia does not support any hydraulic fracturing activity in Nova Scotia and will continue to oppose any and all hydraulic fracturing activity until such time all environmental concerns have been addressed adequately with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia”. <https://mikmagrights.com/?p=4254>, <https://mikmagrights.com/?p=4254>

<sup>6</sup> The seismic research outline includes a statement that “wastewater disposal can... trigger earthquakes” which appears to indicate that underground wastewater disposal may now be considered, contrary to past policy. The Powering the Economy Act, 2026, refers to underground injection wells.

<sup>7</sup> Fracking wastewater from Triangle Petroleum's exploration in Kennetcook/Noel in 2008 contained elevated levels of NORMS. There were multiple problems with handling and disposal. *Out of Control: Nova Scotia's Experience with Fracking for Shale Gas, 2013.*

<sup>8</sup> “A cache of government documents dating back nearly a century casts serious doubt on the safety of the oil and gas industry's most common method for disposing of its annual trillion gallons of toxic wastewater: injecting it deep underground.” <https://www.desmog.com/2026/02/12/the-oil-industrys-latest-disaster-trillions-of-gallons-of-buried-toxic-wastewater/>

EPA recognized that underground injection of fracking wastewater was “a temporary means of disposal,” that should be used only until “a more environmentally acceptable means of disposal [becomes] available.” No safer solution has yet been found. This illustrates that “best industry practices” cannot be assumed to be safe practices.

### **RED FLAG 9: Risks to fresh water supplies**

Fracking uses, and contaminates, massive amounts of fresh water through normal operations. In addition to normal use, contamination of wells and aquifers from drilling, fracking and wastewater disposal have been documented. Nova Scotia residents throughout the province experienced drought for extended periods last year. With the Houston government committed to developing a fracked gas industry before evaluating the risks, and conditions in the Agreement giving the Province full control of information, it is reasonable to wonder whether potential impacts to fresh water supplies will be accurately represented to the public.

### **RED FLAG 10: Methane, market access and climate impacts**

The Agreement states that the goal of the methane study is to determine existing background levels of methane and to establish that methane can be accurately measured in Nova Scotia conditions. The study outline recognizes that “methane emissions [is] the issue most critical to public trust, regulation, **and market access.**” [*Schedule A, Appendix 1, p. 24*]

The methane study outline is the only place where the Agreement recognizes that it is important to know “whether and how onshore gas development could meet environmental and economic expectations.” Unfortunately, the same question is not raised in relation to the overall impact of a fracked gas industry to health, existing industries, water resources, property values, community well-being, Nova Scotia’s economic future or other issues.

Methane is a major contributor to climate change – a greenhouse gas 84 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 20-year period. Shale gas production in North America is a major contributor to increased global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>9</sup>

Independent studies over the past 5-6 years consistently document that methane emissions from the fracked gas and oil industry have been under-estimated and under-reported for years.

Canadian studies measuring real-time methane emissions from the industry documented methane levels often two to five times higher than reported by industry and governments.

Methane releases come from a variety of sources. Researchers studying leakage from abandoned wells in Alberta and Saskatchewan found that 32% had active subsurface leaks, far higher than provincial data estimates of 6–11%. They note that “well integrity failures and groundwater contamination are likely to be more common than previous studies suggest.”<sup>10</sup> A 2021 study of oil and gas extraction in British Columbia<sup>11</sup> found that more than half of methane emissions could be attributed to three main sources: storage tanks (24 percent); compressors (15 percent); and unlit flares (13 percent).

The Agreement’s study goals of conducting a baseline study and monitoring methane emissions during several months of exploratory drilling will not generate data that can reliably reflect methane emissions from an operating shale gas industry in Nova Scotia. It will not reflect the cumulative methane emissions from cradle to grave as the gas is explored, extracted, stored,

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<sup>9</sup> Howarth, R. W.: Ideas and perspectives: is shale gas a major driver of recent increase in global atmospheric methane?, Biogeosciences, 2019

<sup>10</sup> Bowman, L., Methane Emissions from Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada: The Role of Surface Casing Vent Flows, ENERGY AND CLIMATE, 2023

<sup>11</sup> David R. Tyner and Matthew R. Johnson, “Where the Methane Is: Insights from Novel Airborne LiDAR Measurements Combined with Ground Survey Data,” Environmental Science & Technology, 2021

transported, consumed and possibly converted to LNG. The absence of continuing methane monitoring after the exploratory period is an inexcusable omission in data collection. Further, the fact that the province alone has the right to decide what information will be released to the public means it will be difficult to interpret or have confidence in whatever limited data is released about methane levels and methodologies used.

**Missing:** Nowhere in the Agreement is there recognition of the ongoing costs of monitoring, identifying and repairing (where possible) methane leakage from active, inactive and abandoned wells. In Alberta alone there is an unfunded liability for well cleanup estimated at between \$33 billion and over \$100 billion<sup>12</sup> that the government is trying to pass on to taxpayers. Western Canada is now home to thousands of gas wells that have been orphaned or abandoned for more than a decade after companies left for greener pastures or went bankrupt, The long-term financial costs for cleanup, as well as ongoing costs to climate, health and property values are never mentioned in the Agreement.

### **RED FLAG 11: Drilling, fracking and radioactivity – Info coming soon**

### **RED FLAG 12: Health impact study does not study health impacts**

Health risks relating to the onshore fracked gas industry are a major concern. Hundreds of studies have been done since Nova Scotia banned fracking in 2014. Four recent examples include:

- People living within at least 1.5 kilometres of an oil or gas well faced an estimated nine to 21 per cent higher risk of experiencing cardiovascular (heart) or respiratory (breathing) issues. Alberta 2025
- Elderly people living near or downwind of unconventional oil and gas development (UOGD)—which involves extraction methods including directional (non-vertical) drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or fracking—are at higher risk of early death compared with elderly individuals who don't live near such operations. Harvard School of Public Health, 2022.
- A link between the density of fracking operations and increased risk for poor health outcomes for pregnant people and their babies. 5-year study from University of Calgary, 2022.
- Rates of rare lung cancers far above normal in the Peace Region of British Columbia, where there are more than 30,000 fracked wells. Report from four British Columbia physicians, 2026.

The mis-named “Health Impact Study” will not evaluate health risks in areas targeted for potential fracked gas industry in Nova Scotia. Instead, the health impact study outlined in the agreement will “prepare[s] communities for potential energy production by strengthening health literacy.” [*Schedule A, Appendix 1, p. 25*]

### **RED FLAG 13: Earthquake risks**

Both underground wastewater disposal and fracking itself have been found to trigger earthquakes, including in areas where earthquakes have not previously been experienced. Earthquakes linked to the industry increase with frequency and intensity as more fracking takes place. Earthquakes acknowledged to be linked to fracking have been documented 31 miles (50

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<sup>12</sup> Estimated costs vary depending on what is included. Alberta Energy Regulator says \$33 billion, Report from xx says \$100-200 billion. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/calgary/article/alberta-passing-the-bill-for-orphan-well-cleanup-to-the-public-new-report/>

km) from fracking sites “The more fracking we do ... the more earthquakes we will have...” a BC expert told CBC in Feb. 2025.

The SERDIP Agreement states that the 3–4-month seismicity project will “*gain the information needed to... build public confidence that seismic impacts will be monitored transparently and managed responsibly.*” [Appendix A, Schedule 1, p. 24] The Province’s claim that they will be able to “manage earthquakes responsibly” lacks credibility given evidence from other areas. A 2022 report from the British Geological Survey noted that “Forecasting the occurrence of large earthquakes and their expected magnitude remains a scientific challenge for the geoscience community. This is the case for both tectonic and induced earthquakes.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **RED FLAG 14: Limited data cannot accurately predict risks**

Reliable conclusions that will protect people and the environment cannot be drawn from data from drilling and fracking a handful of wells over several months. Published studies clearly show that industry risks, including well casing leakage, earthquake risk, health impacts, risks of water contamination and climate impacts increase as the scale of wells and industry infrastructure grows. A developed shale gas industry involves hundreds or thousands of wells, with infrastructure including pipelines and compressor stations. The cumulative risks of the fracked gas industry can only be understood by a cradle to grave analysis of the industry as a whole and its interconnecting parts as it scales up over time.

It is wildly misleading to claim, as the Agreement does, that information gathered from this short project will “*equip[s] the province with the evidence needed for responsible resource development and support[s] transparent, science-based decision-making that builds public confidence.*” [Schedule A, Appendix 1, pp. 23-4]

#### **RED FLAG 15: Rushed timeline increases risks**

The timeline allows only a few months between selecting a site for exploration and beginning exploration. [Schedule A, 5, p 18] It is virtually impossible that a thorough analysis of potential risks can be carried out in such a short time. It is also doubtful that meaningful public consultation or gaining First Nations informed consent can be carried out in that timeframe. There is no rational reason for the rushed timeline. The timeline increases risks of an industry already recognized as high-risk.

#### **RED FLAG 16: Just trust us: Ignoring decades of science**

More than 2500 studies, carried out over the past two decades, overwhelmingly document multiple risks from the unconventional gas industry.<sup>14</sup> These risks have not been eliminated by regulation or industry best practices.<sup>15</sup> Ignoring the balance of scientific evidence, the SERDIP agreement claims that a few months of study will “help ensure that communities, ecosystems, and drinking water supplies remain protected,” that “seismic impacts will be managed responsibly” and that “health literacy” will be the province’s solution to health impacts associated with the fracked gas industry including miscarriages, premature births, cancers, and premature death in the elderly.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/news/update-on-scientific-shale-gas-report/> . The Report also notes that “Forecasting the occurrence of large earthquakes and their expected magnitude remains a scientific challenge for the geoscience community. This is the case for both tectonic and induced earthquakes.”

<sup>14</sup> Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking and Associated Gas and Oil Infrastructure, Ninth Edition, October 19, 2023, Summary pp. 9-10

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Major Trends, 1) Regulations are incapable of preventing harm, p. 49

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Major Trends, 6) Public health problems associated with fracking include prenatal harm, respiratory impacts, cancer, heart disease, mental health problems, and premature death, p. 61

### **RED FLAG 17: How will exploration activities be regulated?**

While the Agreement states that exploration agreements will be granted “conditional on regulatory compliance,” [Schedule A, 5, Phase 3]

The Agreement contains no information about the regulations that will apply to exploration activities carried out under the Program including water use, wastewater handling, standards for air emissions, noise, proximity to residences, schools, hospitals, nursing homes or wells, or time frames and standards for site cleanup. There is no indication in the Agreement whether there will be transparency about the chemical composition of fracking fluids used, or whether development and exploration activities carried out as part of the project will be fully and transparently monitored and reported for all hazards related to fracking fluid, air emissions, ground and surface water and noise levels.

Existing regulations may not cover hazards specific to the fracked gas industry. For example, Nova Scotia’s air quality regulations cover a limited number of substances, and do not include known hazardous emissions associated with the fracked gas industry, such as benzene, a known carcinogen. Hazardous chemicals found in fracking wastewater may not be addressed in existing wastewater disposal standards. It is unclear whether Dalhousie reviewed and assessed the regulations to be applied to any exploration activities before agreeing to administer the contract.

### **RED FLAG 18: How will exploration activities be monitored and enforced?**

There is no information in the Agreement outlining how monitoring and enforcement of regulations will be carried out. It appears that monitoring will end at the end of the four-month study period. The groundwater/wastewater study states that the program would “*expand monitoring during drilling to quickly detect any changes linked to exploration activity.*” [Schedule A, Appendix 1, p. 23] It is well established that damages and pollution arising from drilling and hydraulic fracturing may develop over a longer time frame than several months. The contract makes no provision for monitoring water or air quality for the full range of contaminants associated with the industry before, during and after exploratory drilling and fracking.

### **RED FLAG 19: Reputational and commercial risks to Dalhousie**

Dr. David Wheeler, Past President of Cape Breton University, and Past Chair of Nova Scotia’s Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing, was blunt when informed about Dal’s participation in the Province’s SERDIP program. Wheeler told media, “...the province appears to be outsourcing its reputational and even commercial risk to Dalhousie University.”

In terms of reputational risk, the terms of the agreement restrict Dalhousie’s right to speak independently, to conduct open-ended studies, to release or freely speak about research results, and to freely exchange information with communities.

These conditions contradict a number of Dalhousie’s core values including academic freedom, impactful community engagement, social responsibility and sustainability, and developing deep and meaningful partnerships and relationships with Indigenous peoples.<sup>17</sup> Dalhousie’s participation in this program on these terms will impact its reputation in the academic and research world and its relationship with communities, including the Mi’kmaq.

Dalhousie’s role in establishing criteria and preliminary selection of companies to undertake exploratory activities for fracked gas, as well as the university’s agreement to allow the Province full control of information, and to “irrevocably erase” confidential information on request, leave the university open to commercial risk as well.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/about/mission-vision-values.html>

**NOFRAC Conclusion:**

Since Nova Scotia banned fracking in 2014, evidence of problems connected to the fracked gas (aka unconventional gas) industry have only increased. There are now over 2500 studies<sup>18</sup> spanning two decades – six times more than in 2014. Overwhelmingly, those studies document risks and harms to that have not been resolved.<sup>19</sup> They show that regulations are often avoided, and estimated harms, such as methane release, can be far lower than actual measured releases. There is no evidence that harms have been eliminated by present day techniques, regulations or by “industry best practices.” Recent studies continue to reveal that problems remain unresolved.

The Houston government is throwing away \$30 million to kickstart an onshore unconventional gas industry including fracking, before fully evaluating whether the industry would have a net benefit for Nova Scotia, or do more harm than good. A clear, science-based process for reviewing the fracking ban existed in the now-repealed legislation, but the Houston government tossed it aside.

The SERDIP project completely fails to meet the standards of independent science, public participation and taking the time needed for each step which were top recommendations of Nova Scotia’s Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing (Wheeler Commission) in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

Nova Scotia’s weak environmental regulations, combined with the government’s abysmal record on environmental protection including a lack of effective monitoring and enforcement of regulations, increase the many known risks of this industry to people, property values, the environment and the Nova Scotia economy.

The Houston government’s fairy tales about safe fracking and miraculous economic benefits including lower power rates ignore the science, ignore ongoing costs and liabilities, and put communities, existing industries and our environment at risk.

There are already better options. The path to affordable power lies with wind and solar, whose costs have dropped by 50% in the past decade and continue to drop. Battery storage is already a viable solution for when the wind doesn’t blow and the sun doesn’t shine, with predicted advances and cost decreases in the next decade.

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<sup>18</sup> Compendium, Summary, p. 10 “Our examination uncovered no evidence that fracking can be practiced in a manner that does not threaten human health directly or without imperiling climate stability upon which human health depends. ... The risks and harms of fracking for public health, the climate, and environmental justice are real and growing. Many early warnings in our previous editions have been borne out. The growing and substantial body of research reveals fundamental problems with the entire life cycle of operations associated with fracking and its infrastructure, which includes pipelines, LNG terminals, frack sand mining operations, and gas stoves inside homes.”

<sup>19</sup> Compendium, Summary, p. 10

<sup>20</sup> “Independently conducted research of a scientific and public participatory nature is required to model economic, social, environmental, and community health impacts of all forms of energy production and use - including any prospect of unconventional gas and oil development in Nova Scotia - at both provincial and community levels,” ... We strongly suggest that whatever time is needed for each of these steps that it should be taken, without any sense of deadline-setting or impatience by any actor.” *Nova Scotia Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing, 2013, Summary.*

Rather than building public confidence, the terms of the SERDIP agreement should increase public concerns and increase opposition to the Houston government's plans to open Nova Scotia to an onshore gas industry including fracking.

Prepared for the Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Coalition (NOFRAC)  
by Barb Harris  
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[www.nofrac.ca](http://www.nofrac.ca)

*Short Summary of "The Province of Nova Scotia - Dalhousie agreement to Develop Onshore Gas: What You Need to Know" is available at <https://nofrac.ca/2026/03/13/province-dalhousie-agreement-summary/>*