



IGNORING THE EVIDENCE

Premier Tim Houston's
Reckless Plan to
Frack for Gas

April 2026

Protecting Our Communities
NOFRAC
Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Coalition

Ignoring the Evidence: Premier Tim Houston's Reckless Plan to Frack for Gas was prepared for the Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Coalition (NOFRAC) by Barb Harris
April 2026.

NOFRAC's 2014 report, *Out of Control: Nova Scotia's Experience with Fracking for Shale Gas* provides detailed background information. The was written based on government documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests. On line at <https://nofrac.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/out-of-control-full-report.pdf>

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NOFRAC works in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. This land is governed by the Peace and Friendship Treaties and has been actively stewarded by the Mi'kmaq since time immemorial.

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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 was signed with Dalhousie University on January 30 2026 to administer a Subsurface Energy R&D Investment Program (SERDIP)¹. 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's report, *Ignoring the Evidence: Premier Tim Houston's Reckless Plan to Frack for Gas*, outlines significant issues of concern in the SERDIP agreement between the Province and Dalhousie, in the context of present day scientific knowledge about the risks of the onshore fracked gas industry.

1 Subsurface Energy R&D Investment Program (SERDIP) Agreement
<https://novascotia.ca/onshore-natural-gas/docs/Subsurface-Energy-RD-Investment-Program-Agreement.pdf>

Note: [square brackets] in the *Ignoring the Evidence* report refer to sections in the SERDIP report

THE AGREEMENT: KEY POINTS



30 MILLION DOLLARS

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.



HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

The agreement makes clear that hydraulic fracturing (fracking) would be involved if an onshore gas industry develops in Nova Scotia.² Material posted by SERDIP³ makes clear that hydraulic fracturing is an expected part of the SERDIP program. Nova Scotia's on-shore gas is located in shale. Gas cannot be extracted from shale without fracking.



THE PROVINCE IS THE BOSS

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]

² 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).

³ <https://subsurfaceenergyns.ca/>



NO INDEPENDENCE FOR DALHOUSIE

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]



INFO BELONGS TO PROVINCE

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.



CONFIDENTIAL

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]



DALHOUSIE’S ROLES

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.

RESEARCH OVER 3-4 MONTHS

Six research projects will take place during the exploratory stage: geology, water & wastewater, methane emissions, seismic (earthquakes), transportation & 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.

WHERE'S THE GAS?

The Horton Bluff formation in the Windsor-Kennetcook Basin is the only gas reserve mentioned by name in the Agreement. [Schedule A, Appendix 1, Geological Studies] The SERDIP website now highlights gas reserves in the Cumberland and Windsor Basins. Material posted earlier on the SERDIP website described the Windsor subbasin as Windsor-Hantsport-Walton.



10.

THE INSIDERS

An Oversight Committee and a Technical Oversight committee make up the main governance structure of the project. [Schedule A, 7, p. 21] The Agreement contains minimal information about the roles of these committees, and no information as to how members will be selected. Committee members are now listed on the SERDIP website. The Oversight Committee includes three Dalhousie reps, two Department of Energy (DoE) reps, two industry reps, one First Nations representative and one community representative, as well as a program manager and additional non-voting Dalhousie personnel and a non-voting scientific director. The Technical Committee includes two program managers, one of whom served on the Board of Directors of Alta Gas, two DoE representatives, two Industry representatives, and a geoscientist.



11.

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT

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.

12.

ONE YEAR TIMELINE

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

April 15: Deadline for companies to submit expressions of interest

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 will not be made public. (Schedule A, Phase 6, p. 20)

13.

ABSENCE OF INTEREST DOES NOT END PROJECT

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].

“ The Province, not Dalhousie, will decide what information will be released to the public. The agreement includes the right to destroy documents and to “erase [material] irrevocably,” including the results of research. ”

THE AGREEMENT: RED FLAGS

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 independent or unbiased. Research conclusions will be highly suspect.

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 may be in violation of existing law. It raises serious questions as to the Province's commitment to its overriding duty to the public interest.

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.

4.**NO 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. The provision that all documents will be labeled confidential creates barriers to transparency and to Freedom of Information requests. Most of what is known about past fracking in the Kennetcook area of Nova Scotia comes from documents accessed through Freedom of Information requests.⁴ 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.

5**GENUINE 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).⁵ 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 in the Agreement study descriptions [Appendix 1] 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.

4 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.
<https://nofrac.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/out-of-control-full-report.pdf>

5 Nova Scotia Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing (2014), Executive Summary, pp. 4-5



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'kmaq 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 as all environmental concerns have been addressed adequately with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.”⁶ The position of the Assembly opposing hydraulic fracturing has been communicated repeatedly to Premier Houston.



7.

STUDIES SUPPORT PREDETERMINED CONCLUSIONS

The study outlines appear designed to support two main predetermined conclusions:

- ▶ that onshore gas should and will be developed in Nova Scotia and
- ▶ 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.” [Appendix 1, pp 23-25]

⁶ “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. As of the date of writing this report (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”. www.mikmaqrightrights.com/?p=4254

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.” [Appendix 1, p 23] This raises a number of red flags.

- ▶ 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.⁷
- ▶ There is no mention of the need for attention to elevated levels of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORMS) in fracking wastewater in Nova Scotia.⁸ Elevated levels of NORMS increase health and environmental risks, making handling and disposal more expensive and challenging. See Red Flag 12.
- ▶ Underground injection of fracking wastewater has multiple risks, including risks of contamination of aquifers and increased risk of earthquakes. Recently disclosed documents⁹ show that for decades, the US Environmental Protection Agency 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” should not be assumed to be safe practices.

7 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 new Powering the Economy Act, 2026, refers to underground injection wells.

8 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. <https://nofrac.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/out-of-control-full-report.pdf> See Red Flag 12.

9 <https://www.desmog.com/2026/02/12/the-oil-industrys-latest-disaster-trillions-of-gallons-of-buried-toxic-wastewater/>

9.**RISKS TO FRESH WATER SUPPLIES**

Fracking uses, and contaminates, massive amounts of fresh water through normal operations. In addition to water used for normal operations, drilling, fracking, spills, wastewater disposal and well casing leakage have led to contamination of wells and aquifers. 46% of Nova Scotians, mainly in rural areas, rely on wells for water. Clean water is critical for individuals and local businesses. Nova Scotia residents throughout the province experienced drought for extended periods in 2025. It is essential to accurately understand the potential impacts of fracking on local water supplies. 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 freshwater supplies will be accurately represented to the public.

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 CO₂ over a 20-year period. Shale gas production in North America is a major contributor to increased global greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰

10 Howarth, R.W. (2019) Ideas and Perspectives: Is shale gas a major driver of recent increases in global atmospheric methane? Biogeosciences, vol.16, iss. 15, pp.3033-3046

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.”¹¹ A 2021 study of oil and gas extraction in British Columbia¹² 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, 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.

“ The absence of continuing methane monitoring after the exploratory period is an inexcusable omission in data collection. ”

11 Bowman, L.V., El Hachem, K., Kang, M. (2023). Methane Emissions from Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada: The role of surface casing vent flows. *Environmental Science & Technology*, v.57, iss.48, pp.19594-19601.

12 Tyner, D.R., Johnson, M.R. (2021). Where the Methane is: Insights from novel airborne LIDAR measurements combined with ground survey data. *Environmental Science & Technology*, v.55, iss.14, pp.9773-9783.

11.

DRILLING, FRACKING AND RADIOACTIVITY

Naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMS) are often found in the deep shale layers that are targeted for fracking. When Triangle Petroleum carried out exploratory drilling in Nova Scotia in 2007-2009, the Province was unprepared to deal with the NORMS that were released by drilling and fracking. NOFRAC's 2013 report *Out of Control: Nova Scotia's Experience with Fracking for Shale Gas*¹³ documents the many missteps that flowed from the government's lack of preparation. Triangle drilled and fracked between 2007-2009. The government did not require testing wastewater for NORMS until 2011. In 2011, wastewater from the Kennetcook waste ponds, which had remained open to the elements in the community for four years, finally included testing for NORMS.

“Analyses documented a range of naturally occurring radioactive elements in the wastewater, including radium 226 and uranium, both of which have long half-lives and known health risks. By the time this information was received by NSE, decisions as to the disposal of millions of litres of wastewater had already been made, without considering the presence of radioactive elements. Waste drilling mud and sand appear to also have been disposed of without testing for the presence of radioactive contaminants.”¹⁴

Fracking can bring radioactive substances to the surface in millions of gallons of fracking wastewater and in drill cuttings. NORMs can build up in soil, pipes, equipment, and trucks. NORMS can also build up in locations where fracking wastewater or solid waste are stored or disposed of. Fracking can open pathways for the migration of radioactive materials, which can be released as airborne particles from the wellhead. Exposure to increased radiation levels from fracking operations is a risk for workers and community members.

13 Out of Control, Nova Scotia's Experience with Fracking for Shale Gas.

<https://nofrac.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/out-of-control-full-report.pdf>

14 Ibid *Out of Control*, p. 11

A Pennsylvania study found ¹⁵ buildings in heavily drilled areas measured significantly higher radon readings than areas without well pads. A 2020 Harvard study¹⁶ documented an increase of airborne radioactivity in communities located 12-31 miles (20 to 50 km) downwind from active fracking sites. ¹⁷

There is no excuse for the Houston government to overlook the issue of NORMS. There is no mention of NORMS in the Agreement. NORMS increase the costs and risks of fracking in Nova Scotia. Companies and communities must be aware of this issue. It is essential that the Province have a transparent plan to address the release and exposure to radioactive materials from gas exploration – and from a potential future industry. What regulations are in place to address these risks? What setbacks from homes, schools and playgrounds are required? What monitoring and testing will be in place? Will background radon levels be monitored before and after exploration? How will liquid and solid waste contaminated with NORMS from exploratory operations be handled and tracked? Will residents be left to cover costs of testing and measures to decrease risks?

The release of NORMS from fracking operations highlights the Importance of full public transparency. Yet the Agreement is designed to block transparency and public access to information.

“ There is no excuse for the Houston government to overlook the issue of naturally occurring radioactive materials. ”

15. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2015/increased-levels-of-radon-in-pennsylvania-homes-correspond-to-onset-of-fracking>

16 Li, L., Blomberg, A.J., Spengler, J.D. et al (2020). Unconventional Oil and Gas Development and Ambient Particle Radioactivity. Nature Communications v.11, art.5002.

17 Compendium, p 76 "The closer communities were located to the wells, the higher the radioactivity in airborne particles. In the Fort Worth, Texas area, where more than 600 fracking wells are located upwind from the city, the team estimated a 40 percent increase in radiation levels. The radioactive elements carried by the ultrafine particles, including polonium, represent the radioactive decay products of uranium isotopes that are liberated from the shale during fracking operations."

12.**HEALTH IMPACT STUDY DOES NOT STUDY HEALTH IMPACTS**

Health risks are one of the major concerns associated with the onshore fracked gas industry. Close to 100 studies on health impacts associated with fracking have been carried out since Nova Scotia banned hydraulic fracturing in 2014. Studies document public health problems associated with fracking including prenatal harm, respiratory impacts, cancer, heart disease, mental health problems, and premature death.¹⁸

Three recent studies, published since 2022, provide insight into the range of serious health impacts associated with living close to or downwind from unconventional gas or oil sites.

- ▶ Nova Scotia researchers studied the health of people living within at least 1.5 kilometres of an oil or gas well in Alberta. They found an estimated nine to 21 per cent higher risk of experiencing cardiovascular (heart) or respiratory (breathing) issues in this population. They also found that “rural and marginalized communities will be at the greatest risk of exposure to air pollution from oil and gas development.”¹⁹
- ▶ Harvard School of Public Health researchers found that “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.”²⁰

18 Compendium p 61

19 <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/21/12/1692>

20 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9004666/>

▶ A multidisciplinary team from University of Calgary’s Cummings School of Medicine studied 35,000 pregnancies in rural Alberta. The study found that babies born to mothers living near hydraulic fracturing sites had increased incidence of low birth weight, premature birth and major congenital abnormalities. The risk increased with increased density of wells. The study concludes “Results suggest that individuals who were exposed to hydraulic fracturing within pregnancy may be at higher risk of several adverse birth outcomes.”²¹

The Health Officers Council of BC passed a resolution in November 2025²² calling for an independent assessment of possible health impacts related to the oil and gas industry. A family physician who has worked in Dawson Creek for 30 years told City Councillors in February 2026 she is seeing rare lung cancers at “an alarming frequency” and believes they are associated with fracking.²³

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

“...babies born to mothers living near hydraulic fracturing sites had increased incidence of low birth weight, premature birth and major congenital abnormalities.”

21 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8981068/>

22 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/public-health-physicians-calling-for-independent-assessment-of-health-impacts-oil-and-gas-9.7123030>

23 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/researchers-fracking-health-effects-bc-peace-region-9.7095889>

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 fracked gas industry increase with frequency and intensity as more fracking takes place. They can vary in intensity from small to large. Earthquakes acknowledged to be linked to fracking have been documented 31 miles (50km) from fracking sites.²⁴ “The more fracking we do ... the more earthquakes we will have,” Gail Atkinson, a consulting seismologist and former professor at Western University in London, Ont. told CBC in Feb. 2025, Referring to the Peace River area of BC, Atkinson said, “In 2021, we saw about 60 earthquakes a year, and in 2024, we were up to 160”²⁵ In both B.C. and Alberta’s gas and oil areas, the number of higher-magnitude earthquakes has gone up. Allan Chapman, a former senior geoscientist with the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission who analyzed the data, concluded the frequency of significant earthquakes will only increase as fracking expands in the Peace River area, CBC reported.²⁶

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 of continuing earthquakes in 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.”¹⁸

“The more fracking we do
... the more earthquakes
we will have.”

24 <https://phys.org/news/2014-05-wastewater-disposal-trigger-quakes-greater.html>

25 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/fracking-bc-texas-earthquakes-1.7447400>

26 Ibid

14.

ONGOING COSTS AND LIABILITIES

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 billion²⁷ that the government is trying to pass on to taxpayers²⁸. 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.

“ The long-term financial liabilities and costs for cleanup, as well as ongoing costs to climate, health and property values are never mentioned in the Agreement. ”

27 Estimated costs vary depending on what costs are included.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-oil-well-cleanup-liability-estimate-1.7087133>

28 Clean Up the MAS: How Alberta's Mature Asset Strategy allows a profitable industry to offload oil and gas cleanup to the public, Schuwerk (2025). Amsterdam: Redwater Insights, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/calgary/article/alberta-passing-the-bill-for-orphan-well-cleanup-to-the-public-new-report/>

15.**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]

“ The timeline increases risks of an industry already recognized as high-risk. ”

16.**RUSHED TIMELINE INCREASES RISKS**

The SERDIP 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.

17.**JUST TRUST US: IGNORING DECADES OF SCIENCE**

More than 2300 studies, carried out over the past two decades, overwhelmingly document multiple risks from the unconventional gas industry.²⁸ These risks have not been eliminated by regulation or industry best practices.²⁹ 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,” [Appendix 1, p. 23] that “seismic impacts will be managed responsibly” [Appendix 1, p. 24] and that “health literacy” [Appendix 1, p. 25] 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.³⁰

18.**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, required setbacks from 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 chemicals used in 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.

28 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

29 Ibid, Major Trends, 1) Regulations are incapable of preventing harm, p. 49

30 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

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. There is a need for transparency relating to all regulations that will apply to exploratory drilling, fracking or other activities under this Program. In the interest of informing communities, all applicable regulations should be made available to the public in an easily accessible format.

19.

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. There is also no commitment to transparency of full monitoring methodologies and results.

“ 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. ”

20.

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 restrictive 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.³¹ 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 may leave the university open to commercial risk as well.

“ These restrictive 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. ”

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

THIS IS NOT THE 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 2300 studies ³² spanning two decades – six times more than in 2014. Overwhelmingly, those studies document risks and harms that have not been resolved. ³³ Studies show that regulations are often insufficient or avoided. They show that estimated harms, such as methane releases, are often 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.”

The Houston government is spending \$30 million of public money to kickstart an onshore unconventional gas industry including fracking. They are doing this without fully evaluating the real costs vs benefits to the province. 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 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. ³⁴

The Houston government has an abysmal record on environmental protection. Weak environmental regulations and a lack of effective monitoring and enforcement of protective regulations are all too common in Nova Scotia. Barriers that might limit the harms of fracking or other extractive industries have been removed – as former employees of the Wildlife Division of the Department Natural Resources can testify. These factors increase the many known risks of a high-risk onshore gas industry to people, property values, the environment and Nova Scotia’s economy.

32 Compendium, Summary, p. 10

33 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."

34 "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, 2014, Summary.

NOT THE CONCLUSION

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.

Nova Scotians are beginning to see more clearly what the Houston government's new resource extraction agenda means. The Spring 2026 budget revealed what this government values, and what it does not consider important. Funding fracking is part of a fossil fuel agenda that includes gas-diesel peaker plants in Pictou County and other supporting projects. Houston's extraction agenda, including previously banned uranium, goes hand in hand with threats to protected lands and cutting funds for arts and culture, tourism, wildlife protection and supports for vulnerable communities. The full costs of Houston's new agenda - both immediate and longer term - are becoming clearer.

Informed Nova Scotians stopped fracking before. We can do it again. NOFRAC hopes this report will help to counter the government's misinformation about fracking for gas. We hope it will help people understand why Nova Scotia's ban on fracking was good public policy in the past and remains the right choice today. As we work together to stop fracking and other harmful projects, we can also work together to build, or rebuild, a province where people, wildlife, clean water and air, and people and climate-friendly economies thrive together.

This is not the conclusion.

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Protecting Our Communities

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Nova Scotia Fracking Resource and Action Coalition