

Indigenous Perspectives on Fracking and Water



Bay St George Mi'kmaq Elder Victor Muise (centre) walks with community members in Stephenville, Newfoundland to raise awareness about the dangers of fracking.

Pikto'l Sa'kej Muise (Victor Muise) is a Mi'kmaq from Bay St. George on the west coast of Newfoundland. He is involved in traditional teaching and is a certified prospector, and he has been involved in his community's fight against fracking.

Our people have been here for a long time. We come from an oral tradition and learned our culture and knowledge by carefully listening to what our Elders and other people say. To survive within the spirit of our traditions, respect for the environment and Mother Earth, we listen and determine the truth of what has been said by reflecting.

I understand that the Mi'kmaq People and other Aboriginal peoples are the custodians of the land and the water. What we do to Mother Earth, we do to ourselves. We are not outside the environment; we are the environment. We learn through our teachings that we have to make decisions for the next seven generations. This principle is fundamental to our ways and how we see the world.

Today we treat the land poorly by fracking for oil and gas. What we do to the land, we do to ourselves. When I talk about fracking with the youth, they express their deep concerns. A lot has been said about chemicals, well contamination and the lack of regulations. Some of the youth are well educated and have researched hydraulic fracturing and believe that this is not good for the land, our people and the animals. We have learned in this process that other

Aboriginal organizations around the Gulf of St. Lawrence have voted for a moratorium on fracking to protect their rights to safe water and clean land.

The Mi'kmaq people I talk to have problems understanding how governments (in Ottawa and in St. John's) can make such important decisions without consultation with our people. Governments know that the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that there is a "duty to consult" with Aboriginal peoples before important projects go ahead. They do not have the moral authority, the mandate or the support from the people to frack. Governments should also know that allowing consultants and oil companies to make short, simple, limited, unclear presentations to the Aboriginal peoples in the area cannot be considered sufficient consultation in any court of law.

Amy Sock is a self-described "woman warrior" from the Elsipogtog First Nation in New Brunswick. She describes the tension she feels since the Harper government passed omnibus budget legislation that reduced or removed many of Canada's environmental protections.

When I was a child everything around me amazed me – the ladybugs, the long-legged spiders, the river and the sand. I grew up having a great-grandfather who made baskets and was an avid fisherman, just like my 85-year-old Mi'kmaq grandfather. As you may imagine, I ate mainly fish: mackerel, salmon, lobsters, clams, eels, bass, trout and smelts are my

favourite. As a forty-something Native woman (Lnuisk), my heart is in sync with Mother Earth. I cannot explain how I feel properly in our English language. It's like the blood running through my whole body revives and the beauty of it all engulfs me each time I fish, camp, pick berries or see an eagle.

Never would I have thought I'd be referred to as an "activist," "terrorist" or "a radical," but since Canada passed the omnibus budget bills, those are names I now have.

The contents of these bills affect the land and water. The regulations previously in place for centuries were replaced by ones that make water, lands and resources like oil and gas easier industry to access.

The changes in the bills made it my personal duty to save our water. I was happy to find I am not alone in this battle. Our numbers are growing – we have been joined by many kind-hearted people, the English, the French, and the Acadians, and people from many parts of the world are watching and praying for us. They come to us in great numbers with kindness and gratitude and an open mind to try and understand our ways.

For as long as I shall breathe, water and its safety will be my problem. For we Lnuisk do not own the land, we are here to protect Mother Earth. It's our duty. And our Aboriginal and treaty rights – which are legally binding laws – say so as well.