



Media Release

May 30, 2016

Researchers to Host a “Citizen’s Deliberation” on Energy Policy

Researchers from St. Thomas University and the University of Guelph will be using a unique approach to public consultation when they conduct a citizen’s deliberation on the hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” issue as a case study in public policy formulation.

Professor Kelly Bronson, from the Science and Technology Studies program at St. Thomas University, is partnering with research colleagues Professor Kieran O’Doherty and post-doctoral researcher Jenn Dobson from the University of Guelph in the citizen’s deliberation which is being held on June 4th. With this approach, citizens gather to receive information on a topic, discuss the topic with others, and make well-informed policy recommendations to government.

“Governments used to make very important decisions, ones affecting everyday people, without asking the public for their input. This is no longer the case, and today it is widely known that average people can have really important information and opinions to provide to decision-makers. The key is to find the best means of seeking that input,” said Bronson.

Bronson and her colleagues see this citizen’s deliberation as a case study in good policy formation for the province.

“The extension of the moratorium on fracking suggests, at a minimum, an ongoing need for public consultations on this challenging public policy issue. A citizen’s deliberation could form a template or a set of good practices for how to effectively engage New Brunwickers on issues of importance, which could apply to other energy technologies,” Bronson said.

“We will be teasing out the values underlying hydraulic fracturing that are important to this community. These could underwrite any energy policy for the province—experts, scientists and politicians have opinions about what should be done to maintain a clean and a thriving New Brunswick, and we want citizens to be a part of these conversations.”

The purpose of the research is to conduct a one-day deliberation on fracking with ordinary New Brunwickers and give attention to Aboriginal voices. Bronson said the researchers are interested in a discussion that goes beyond the technical details to include what values this group of citizens thinks the government should consider when it forms decisions about energy policy.

Bronson noted that the citizen’s deliberation is in line with the report of the New Brunswick Commission on Hydraulic Fracturing released in February and the government’s decision to extend a moratorium on fracking. The Commission report pointed out the need for greater public input and engagement on the issue as it found that “science alone cannot guide the development of effective public policy” and that sectors need to work collaboratively to “design solutions that adhere to community values and aspirations”.

More to the point of the approach of this citizen’s deliberation, the Commission’s report observed that “left out are the people in the middle who either don’t know or don’t want to say what they think for fear of being ridiculed and/or criticized by either of the two sides.” As well, the government defends the extension of a moratorium citing continued First Nations’ concerns and it is these participants who were recruited into this citizen’s deliberation.

- 30 -

Media Contact – Jeffrey Carleton at (506) 452-0522 or carleton@stu.ca.