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Seismic on Lakes – there I said it – this has been a taboo subject for the past 8 months or so. I will start this column with the quote I finish with – “The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and simple”. I can apply this to a number of the issues a Trade Association gets to deal with – Why does the Alberta public not like the Oil and Gas Industry? Why do we have to do Aboriginal Consultation for Geophysical work? Why have they changed the interpretation of working in the riparian area in Alberta? Why can't we just shoot seismic on lakes like we used to? And those are but a few of the small and simple policy changes that are anything but pure and simple in reality.

I will spend most of this column on Alberta but in fairness to the issue and the changing world it is of note that BC has legislated an “Oil and Gas Landowner Notification Program”. The intent is to provide registered surface owners with information about upcoming provincial petroleum and natural gas (PNG) rights sales. The goal of the program is to give a landowner time before a company acquires PNG tenure to better understand the oil and gas development process and their rights in the process. The program is also part of the Ministry's Energy Plan commitment to improve landowner notification and awareness of sales of oil and gas rights on private land (No. 54) and to examine oil and gas tenure policies and develop guidelines to determine areas that require special consideration prior to tenure approval (No. 55). The guidelines are in development now for how Industry will interact with landowners. They will also allow an appeal mechanism for Landowners (at a minimum for surface leases). Geophysical Programs look different as it is a temporary access situation rather than a permanent removal from the land. The particulars remain in discussion however it is expected something will be in place by spring 2008.

Seismic on Lakes in Alberta is a similar shade to this new enhanced capacity of the stakeholder (in this case landowner). At the highest level is recognized a new term – “recreational”. We conceptually know what that means but no one has put a firm framework around a suitable definition nor has it been functionally applied to the actual waterbodies in Alberta. The problem encountered on Marie Lake was more about the lack of process that existed for public engagement (in the seismic world) than it was about the well-being of fish and/or habitat. The Federal Department of Fisheries (DFO) is OK with seismic on lakes for the most part. However the questions asked by the public were difficult to answer for Alberta Sustainable Resources Department (SRD) and given the excellent use of the media by the dissenters, Stelmach made the decision (sending seismic waves through the Industry) to reverse the approval and ask the company to step down from its work plan.

After a six month hiatus we were able to reengage the Government. This was an issue that once the activity was halted, the bureaucracy had no direction provided by the political component. It took a number of requests and letters for the politicians to provide the bureaucracy with some framework to move ahead within. Even today we continue to talk about the fish and habitat side as SRD needs some comfort in the scientific side in order to respond to questions from the public however the real challenge is the concept of “recreational” lakes.

Conceptually (or for the sake of simplicity) we are attempting to divide up Surface Waters into four categories with Fish Bearing / Non-Fish Bearing on one axis and Recreational / Non-Recreational on the other axis. So again conceptually the Non-Non quadrant might be areas such as the named surface water areas reserved for dam run-off or overflow areas in the foothills (otherwise grassy plains). Fish Bearing // Non-Recreational might be certain “Oilsand-area” riparian areas; Non-Fish // Recreational might be “dead” lakes that are used by recreationalists; and finally Fish Bearing / Recreational (perhaps the easiest to conceptualize) would be the Marie Lakes of the Province. Most of these are just “might be’s” as we lack true definitions nor have we achieved committee consensus that this is the right methodology to solve this issue.

Nonetheless there will a new and important element of public consultation required for something akin to “recreational” lakes. We are cautious on this element as Geophysical Programs have confidentiality attached to them under Section 50 of the Mines and Minerals Act. We have had to give up some of this under the Aboriginal Consultation requirements however it behooves to tread carefully as such requirements expand.

We worked with CAPP and the other Associations in taking their Guide on Effective Public Engagement to an offered Enform Course of which I highlight here.

Effective public involvement is critical to the success of any upstream oil and gas project. When done appropriately, public involvement not only adds value to the specific project, it also strengthens stakeholder relationships. An effective public involvement program will enhance the social, environmental, and financial sustainability of all industry-related projects.

As stated in the CAPP Guide for Effective Public Involvement (2004), “No one debates the value of good relations between the petroleum industry and its stakeholders. Misunderstandings, disagreements or opposing views can affect your business, resulting in cost increases, project delays, and regulatory censures, which can ultimately lead to a poor corporate reputation” (p.3). This view supports the need for an effective public involvement program.

Public involvement is the term used for a spectrum of approaches that can help build relationships and mitigate misunderstandings or disagreements with stakeholders. It gives stakeholders the opportunity to participate in and possibly influence, certain business activities that may affect them.

Public involvement is a ‘fit-for-purpose’ process. In other words, there is no one public involvement program that is a template for every project. Each stakeholder has their own interests, perspectives and experiences with industrial developments. By getting to know each other, you can identify mutual issues and mutual solutions to problems, creating a

public involvement program that is right for your company and the communities with whom you interact. (CAPP, 2004).

This is as new world for seismic; that much is for certain.

The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.

- Oscar Wilde