

Chiefs oppose small reactors on First Nations territory

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First Nations leaders are vehemently opposing small nuclear reactors on their territory.

Chiefs of the Anishinabek Nation, representing 40 Indigenous communities across Ontario, unanimously endorsed a grand council resolution June 6 stating their objection to the construction, operation, storage or disposal of small modular reactors — or SMRs — anywhere on their lands, including bodies of water.

“We, as Anishinabek, have the responsibility to act as stewards of our lands and waters,” stated Grand Council Chief Glen Hare in a release. “SMRs and nuclear power in general represent an unacceptable risk to our nation.”

The Anishinabek Nation is “vehemently opposed to any effort to situate SMRs within our territory,” said Hare. “The stance we have taken is in support of the seven generations to come.”

Apart from being small, this type of nuclear reactor is transportable, the political organization points out.

“Industry proponents of the SMRs are positioning this technology as a cheap energy and heating source for remote communities,” the Anishinabek Nation said. “The largest push to adopt these small nuclear fission reactors has come from those in the industry, who are looking for cheap energy to power their mines and other industrial developments.”

The organization said the federal government has now put their support behind the SMRs, against the wishes of native leaders.

“The Anishinabek Nation has advised the Senate Review Committee on Bill C-69 of our opposition to the effort of the nuclear industry in seeking exemptions from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act,” said Hare. “The nuclear industry must be subject to public review and comment; compliance to Canada’s Environmental Assessment Act would ensure this.”

Bill C-69, An Act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, changes how major infrastructure projects are assessed and approved, including oil and gas pipelines, electricity transmission and major highway and ports. The bill recently underwent its third reading and was passed by the senate with amendments on June 6.

Anishinabek leaders are concerned with potential environmental implications of SMRs.

“These reactors are small in scale but could contribute to the growing amount of nuclear waste that the federal government is looking to dispose of somewhere in Ontario,” warned the Anishinabek Nation.

“While other countries are shifting away from nuclear energy to more sustainable sources for their energy needs, Canada appears to be welcoming the expansion of the nuclear industry, with limited assurance on the safe containment of radioactive waste,” said Hare. “I am concerned that Canada may become the radioactive dump of the world as other countries seek to dispose of their radioactive waste.”

The Anishinabek Nation has been working with the Iroquois Caucus to oppose the transportation and disposal of nuclear waste in Anishinabek territory for many years.

The recent Grand Council resolution is in line with a similar resolution passed by the Assembly of First Nations that demands the federal government uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 29.

According to this article, “states shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials take place in the lands and territories of Indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.”

The Anishinabek Nation, representing about 65,000 people, is the oldest political organization in Ontario and can trace its roots back to the Confederacy of Three Fires, which existed long before European contact.