

Alberta Nuclear Consultation, summary

Executive Summary

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1.0 Executive Summary

Following the release of the [Nuclear Power Expert Panel's report](#), the Alberta Ministry of Energy engaged Innovative Research Group Inc. to conduct the Alberta Nuclear Public Consultation. The consultation process began with a multi-pronged qualitative research process to identify the range of views that Albertans hold on Alberta's electricity options and nuclear energy. Once those views were identified, they provided the foundation for a telephone survey of 1024 randomly-recruited Albertans to see how many Albertans agreed with the various viewpoints raised during the qualitative research process. Since only the telephone results are statistically representative of the Alberta population, the Executive Summary report uses the telephone survey results to illustrate key findings. However, the results from all four elements of the study are provided in the detailed findings section of this report for readers to review at their pleasure.

Key findings include the following:

1. Given a choice of three options in the randomly-recruited, quantitative telephone survey of Albertans, a plurality (45%) preferred that nuclear power plants be considered on a case-by-case basis. About one-quarter (27%) said the province should oppose proposals, while about one-fifth (19%) said the province should encourage proposals. One in twelve (8%) said they didn't know.
2. Albertans' preference for a case-by-case review is based on their conflicting underlying attitudes:
 - o While most Albertans believe the province needs to grow, a minority believe growth is neither desirable nor inevitable. Albertans who share this view have a strong likelihood of opposing the consideration of nuclear power as an energy option for Albertans.
 - o Albertans have conflicting views on nuclear specific attitudes. The typical Albertan is both confident that science and the industry have things under control yet fearful of the potential negative impacts of nuclear. Only those Albertans who hold consistently positive views of science and the nuclear industry - and are less concerned by the potential for negative consequences - actually want to see the government encourage nuclear proposals.

- Albertans who want to see nuclear proposals judged on a case-by-case basis share a belief that growth will require more electricity and have the conflicted views on nuclear described above. This middle ground is divided by several considerations. Some are strongly driven by a desire to keep electricity prices low no matter what. Others are passionate about growth and electricity's role in driving growth but hesitate over nuclear consequences.
3. In reviewing nuclear power plant proposals, Albertans want the government to focus primarily on the health, environment and safety aspects of the nuclear plants, including the handling and storage of nuclear waste. These priorities were inter-related. While a strong majority (79%) of Albertans believe it is critical to keep the price of electricity as low as possible, economic concerns such as cost and reliability of electricity supply and the economic benefits created by new power plants were generally raised only after health, environment and safety factors.

Background to Key Findings

- **Given a choice of three options in the random quantitative survey of Albertans, a plurality (45%) preferred that proposals to build nuclear power plants be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. About one-quarter (27%) said the province should oppose proposals, while about one-fifth (19%) said the province should encourage proposals. One in twelve (8%) said they didn't know.**

In the quantitative survey, there was a significant gender difference in levels of support. Men (29%) were three times more likely to say that the province should encourage proposals than women (9%). More women (31%) said they wanted the province to oppose proposals than men (25%). As with the overall results, a plurality of women (47%) and men (42%) said proposals should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

The differences between regions were not as striking as gender. While support for encouraging proposals was at or about 1 in 5 in all regions, the North region (780 area code except Edmonton) was most opposed (32%) compared to the Calgary region (24%), which was least opposed.

In the public consultation process, Albertans voluntarily completed the workbook survey. They were more polarized and more opposed in their views on nuclear energy, compared to the general population reflected in the quantitative survey results. Of the voluntary participants, more than 4 in 5 said they would either encourage (28%) or oppose (55%) nuclear power plant proposals, with only 1 in 6 (16%) choosing the case-by-case option. By contrast, a majority of the participants in the randomly-recruited discussion groups favoured a case-by-case consideration (57%), with just over 1 in 5 wanting proposals encouraged (22%), and about 1 in 7 wanting the province to oppose proposals (13%). While neither of these qualitative processes reflect a statistically valid representative sample of Albertans, their participation was instrumental in allowing the researchers to understand the range of views on the issues, providing critical input into the quantitative survey.

Knowledge seems to be a necessary but not sufficient requirement for support while opposition was relatively stable across self-assessed levels of nuclear knowledge. Support grew dramatically as knowledge grew. The same relationship is seen between those who are more engaged in Alberta's electricity issues and those who are less engaged.

- **Albertans' preference for a case-by-case review is based on their conflicting underlying attitudes:**

Attitudes towards growth key to attitudes towards nuclear

Over two-thirds (69%) of quantitative survey respondents agreed that: "We are going to need a lot more electricity to maintain our quality of life and economic well-being". This finding was consistent with input from the randomly-recruited discussion groups and the workbook survey responses. While most Albertans believe the province needs to grow, a minority does not believe growth is desirable or inevitable, with many of them having strong environmental motivations. For the most part, Albertans who prefer to avoid growth do not want more power. They are willing to support new power sources, but only if the new source replaces a more damaging existing power source. Those who prefer to avoid growth have a strong likelihood of opposing the consideration of nuclear power as an energy option for Albertans.

Conflicting nuclear views drive Albertans to case-by case review

A majority of Albertans believe that science can solve the nuclear waste issue (61% agree) and are confident that the nuclear industry can build and operate nuclear plants safely (65%). At the same time, over 7 in 10 Albertans (72%) agreed that: "I worry we don't understand the health impacts of nuclear power plants on surrounding communities". Over 3 in 4 (77%) agreed that "It's wrong to generate 40 or 50 years of electricity for our generation and then leave a nuclear waste problem that will go on for generations to come", including a majority (56%) who strongly agreed.

The typical Albertan sees growth as inevitable and trusts both science and the nuclear industry, yet there remains a fear of the unknown and the long-term risks of nuclear. It is this conflict that leaves the largest group of Albertans supporting a case-by-case review.

Those Albertans who trust science and industry, and are less concerned about the likelihood of potential negative consequences of nuclear energy, are the most likely to want to see nuclear proposals encouraged.

Price sensitivity divides Albertans with conflicting views on growth and nuclear

The conflict between underlying attitudes is explored in more detail through cluster analysis in the quantitative survey report. Cluster analysis allows us to group Albertans by shared attitudes.

The cluster analysis shows that price sensitivity is a key factor for about one quarter of the

Albertans with seriously conflicted attitudes on nuclear energy. However, most Albertans believe cost should not be the only deciding factor. Over 7 in 10 (72%) disagreed with the statement: “I don’t care where we get power from so long as it is at the lowest price”. Over 2 in 5 (41%) strongly disagreed.

Affordable green options

Three-quarters of the telephone respondents (75%) agreed that: “We can have all the affordable electricity from renewable energy we need if we really try”. Similar views were consistently expressed in the randomly-recruited discussion groups and argued strongly in the environmental stakeholder groups.

- **In reviewing nuclear power plant proposals, Albertans want the government to focus primarily on the health, environment and safety aspects of the nuclear plants, including the handling and storage of nuclear waste. These priorities were inter-related and elevated above secondary concerns such as cost and reliability of electricity supply.**

Albertans placed safety, waste, health, and environmental considerations at the top of the list as most important considerations when evaluating potential power projects. All of these items received extremely or very important ratings in the 80% to 90% range. This hierarchy of issues was much the same in the qualitative research process. As was found in the randomly-recruited discussion groups, discussion of safety would lead to health issues, discussion of environment would lead to concerns over waste, and so on. These issues are strongly linked in many Albertans’ minds.

The underlying concern for many Albertans is fear of catastrophe. Over 6 in 10 Albertans agreed that “I am reluctant to take a chance on nuclear energy because when things go wrong, they go very wrong”. While a majority of Albertans shared the key concerns of health, environment, safety, and waste, there was a difference between those who trusted that science would find a way to manage waste safely and trusted the industry to operate safely, compared to those who did not agree and whose fears have not been placated. Trust in science and in the industry was a key factor driving support for nuclear energy.

Although they were rarely the first mentions in the discussion groups, economic criteria were also on the minds of Albertans. The following were extremely or very important considerations for a majority of Albertans: a dependable supply of electricity (68%); impact on the price of electricity (62%); and job creation (54%).

Other Findings:

- **Consultation.** Participants in the randomly recruited discussion groups and stakeholder groups called for more public education and consultation. Many participants discussed the “fear of the unknown” and the need for time to inform the public. Other participants discussed the need for more voices to be heard, including environmental voices. In particular, environmental stakeholders called for a more public debate and the need to

bring forward research not included in the Expert Panel report. Local government and business stakeholders spoke to the need for a public consultation process that functions effectively, and learns from mistakes of past public consultations. First Nations and Métis stressed their desire for Nation-to-Nation consultations whenever their Treaty or Aboriginal rights were involved. Some participants expressed the need for the government to make decisions and not to consult indefinitely.

- **Community.** In the qualitative research process, randomly-recruited group participants and local government representatives wanted the construction of a nuclear power plant proposal to anticipate and plan for community impacts, including adequate support for communities to keep pace with infrastructure, housing, medical and social services needs. Many participants cited the example of Fort McMurray as an example of improperly planned growth that they wished to avoid.
- **Industry Impact of Nuclear.** Both environmental and business stakeholders were concerned with the impact that a large baseload nuclear power plant would have on the electricity system in terms of discouraging new investment for other energy suppliers - including renewable energy - and the ability of the system to manage electricity supply when the nuclear supply goes offline for either maintenance or repair.

[Overview of the Public Consultation Process>>](#)

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