



Sunday » December
30 » 2007

Environmentalist receives censored documents

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EDMONTON - A prominent environmentalist says she is disappointed with the royalties documents the government released to her this week, more than a year after she requested to see them.

Martha Kostuch this week received approximately 1,100 pages of documents from Alberta Energy regarding the fairness of the province's royalty regime and strategies for oilsands development.

The documents, however, were heavily censored. Numerous sections detailing recommendations made to government the past five years were removed from the files.

"It was more about what wasn't there than what was there," Kostuch said after reviewing the papers. "This information should be available to the public - they own the resource."

Earlier this year, The Journal also received heavily censored documents in response to its request to see information from the government's previous royalty reviews.

In October, Auditor General Fred Dunn said the government knew years ago that royalty rates could have been raised without seriously impacting industry revenues.

His comments came a month after a government-appointed royalty review panel found that Alberta wasn't getting its fair share from the province's energy resources. As a result of the review, Premier Ed Stelmach has agreed to implement some changes, starting in 2009.

Despite the chunks of missing information, Kostuch said the files released this week are still valuable since they prove government staff had been making recommendations on royalty rates for years. The documents also show that Alberta's royalties are among some of the lowest in the world.

The release of the documents marked part of a victory for Kostuch who was initially quoted a \$7,000 fee to have her requests for information processed. Kostuch, who is suffering from a terminal illness, had also feared she would die before the information was released.

Alberta Energy eventually waived the fee and arranged to have the documents provided to Kostuch.

Another batch of documents is scheduled to be released early next year.

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