Regional Assessment of Oil and Gas Exploratory Drilling in the Canada–Nova Scotia Offshore Area

What We Heard Report – From comments received during the public review of the draft Terms of Reference

Comment Period

The draft Terms of Reference for the Regional Assessment of Oil and Gas Exploratory Drilling in the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Area (NSRA) was posted on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry and a public comment period initiated from May 19-to June 8, 2026. Comments were received by email, Registry submission, and from discussion in meetings.

Approximately 111 comments (from 24 submissions) were received from Indigenous groups, industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the public.

What We Heard from Indigenous Groups

Indigenous Rights and Interests

Indigenous participants requested stronger recognition of Indigenous rights, interests, governance systems, stewardship responsibilities, and connections to the marine environment. Comments emphasized that rights-related considerations extend beyond fisheries and include cultural, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions.

Indigenous Knowledge

Participants requested stronger integration of Indigenous Knowledge throughout the Regional Assessment and emphasized that it should inform analysis, findings, recommendations, and future decision-making. Participants also highlighted the importance of respecting Indigenous Knowledge systems, protocols, confidentiality requirements, and the ability of Knowledge Holders to review how information is represented.

Participation, Engagement and Consultation

Indigenous participants emphasized the need for meaningful participation throughout the Regional Assessment, including opportunities to provide input on key deliverables and recommendations. Comments also highlighted the importance of consultation processes that reflect Indigenous consultation protocols and the Crown's consultation obligations.

Assessment Scope

Participants requested broader consideration of Indigenous health, well-being, culture, socio-economic conditions, harvesting activities, cumulative effects, and impacts on Indigenous rights. Some participants also raised archaeological and cultural heritage considerations in offshore areas.

Accommodation and Future Consultation

Participants sought clarity regarding accommodation measures and requested assurance that the Regional Assessment would not replace future project-specific consultation, accommodation, or impact assessment requirements.

Timeline

Several Indigenous participants expressed concern that the proposed timeline may limit opportunities for meaningful engagement, technical review, and participation, particularly given existing consultation demands and seasonal community priorities.

Exclusion Regulations and Future Regulatory Processes

Participants expressed concern that Regional Assessment findings could be used to support future exclusion regulations without adequate Indigenous involvement. Comments emphasized that any future regulatory approaches should respect Indigenous rights and consultation obligations.

What We Heard from Industry, the Public and Non-Governmental Organizations

Cumulative Effects

There was broad support for a comprehensive cumulative effects assessment. Participants recommended consideration of existing and future offshore activities, fisheries, shipping, offshore wind development, and climate-related pressures.

Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems

Many submissions highlighted the importance of protecting fish and fish habitat, commercial and Indigenous fisheries, marine mammals, species at risk, and sensitive marine ecosystems.

Climate Change and Sustainability

Environmental organizations and some members of the public called for stronger consideration of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity protection, precautionary approaches, and long-term sustainability.

Valued Components and Study Area

Commenters requested additional details regarding valued components, including marine species, fisheries, ecosystem health, socio-economic conditions, and sensitive marine areas.

Regulatory Clarity

Industry stakeholders generally supported the NSRA and sought clarity regarding expected outcomes, implementation of recommendations, use of existing information, and implications for future regulatory processes.

Exclusion Regulations and Future Assessments

Some participants expressed concern that NSRA outcomes could contribute to future exclusion regulations. These comments emphasized the importance of maintaining appropriate project-specific review, consultation, and environmental protection measures.

Information Sources and Data Gaps

Participants encouraged the use of existing studies, previous regional assessments, strategic assessments, and available scientific and Indigenous Knowledge sources while focusing effort on key information gaps.

Diverse Public Views

Public comments reflected a range of perspectives. Some participants emphasized economic benefits, employment, and energy security associated with offshore oil and gas development, while others focused on climate change, environmental risks, and alternative energy pathways.

Conclusion

Primary themes included meaningful Indigenous participation, cumulative effects assessment, protection of fisheries and marine ecosystems, consideration of climate change, and clarity regarding the future use of NSRA findings, and the need for sufficient time and engagement opportunities to support meaningful Indigenous participation throughout the process.

Treatment of comments and next step

All comments received have been considered in finalizing the Terms of Reference and will inform the conduct phase of the regional assessment.

A Summary of Comments Received and Action Taken providing information on how each comment was considered in the final and approved the Terms of Reference will be posted on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry in the upcoming weeks.

The Regional Assessment in the Regional Assessment of Oil and Gas Exploratory Drilling in the Canada–Nova Scotia Offshore Area is now in the conduct phase.