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BAPE Report Urges More Respect for Municipal Responsibilities

The Union of Quebec Municipalities (UMQ) welcomes the guidelines proposed by the report of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) inquiry on sustainable development of the shale gas industry in Quebec.

In its presentation to the BAPE commission on November 11 last year, the UMQ argued that greater respect be shown toward municipal responsibilities in the conditions allowing companies to conduct explorations and exploitation of gas deposits. The UMQ particularly asked for a more balanced relationship between the powers of municipalities in matters of land use planning and development and the rights conferred on industry by the ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife (MRNF).

“Municipal councillors are political actors who are democratically elected. They're closer to the citizens, and they remain the ones who are best placed to oversee the harmonious coexistence of different forms of land use. For us, the fact that the BAPE is recommending that powers be granted to municipalities to deal with shale gas development as they do for all other industries is certainly a step in the right direction,” said UMQ president Éric Forest, mayor of Rimouski. The UMQ is now waiting to see the BAPE recommendations translated into legislation, in the bill amending the Mining Act and an expected bill governing hydrocarbons.

The UMQ is also pleased with one of the key BAPE recommendations, which calls for a strategic environmental assessment in order to find out more about the shale gas industry's impacts and conduct further testing.

“This proposal addresses the concerns raised in our brief, where we expressed our uneasiness over many environmental impacts that are still poorly understood, particularly regarding protection of water sources and wastewater emissions from the shale fracturing process,” added Salaberry-de-Valleyfield Mayor Denise Lapointe, chair of the UMQ environment committee.

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