

COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Website

The technology available today affords unprecedented opportunity to ensure public access to the proceedings of a public inquiry. Accordingly, one of the first tasks I assigned to my communications coordinator/media relations officer was to identify and work with a webmaster to design a website that would offer current and complete information on all aspects of the Inquiry.

Public accessibility considerations strongly influenced the content of the Inquiry's website. During the hearings, the transcripts were available on the website no later than the evening of the day the testimony was heard. We kept the other areas of the website up to date with hearing schedules, my public statements and decisions on motions, research papers commissioned by the Inquiry, and other information on the progress of the Inquiry.

In addition to comprehensive links to information, the website included features designed to engage the public in the work of the Inquiry. Through the "feedback" link, for example, visitors to the site could convey their views or share information with me, commission counsel, and other staff. We continually improved the format of the website, and added new links to encompass the breadth and depth of the policy work as it progressed. In terms of public access, however, the addition of a link from our website to a live webcast of the hearings and some of the policy consultations had the greatest impact. We began the live webcast some months after the hearings started, which made it possible for interested individuals, anywhere in the country and beyond, to see and hear the proceedings of the Inquiry in real time. A public inquiry is necessarily conducted in the public view, but through this technology, the reach of the public forum was extended to a degree never before possible. I am grateful for the assistance of counsel for the Estate of Dudley George and George Family Group for helping us to make this service available.

The live webcast had other benefits. Commission counsel and other commission staff could follow the proceedings, even when other responsibilities or cost considerations made it impractical for them to travel to Forest. The same advantage applied to counsel for the parties with standing. I pointed out to them that each party had a continuing responsibility to carefully consider the necessity for their counsel to be present in Kimball Hall from beginning to end of each hearing day and week, and

that our webcast and daily postings of the transcripts were an excellent means of following the proceedings and thus realizing further efficiencies.⁶⁶

Initially, we only webcast the hearings. It soon became apparent, however, that the webcast had established a new level of expectation for public access to the Inquiry's activities and we added webcasts of other Inquiry activities when feasible. In my view, our webcast elevated the threshold for accessibility and transparency in public inquiries, and it will be difficult for any future inquiry not to webcast the proceedings. For instance, our example was followed in the Cornwall Public Inquiry,⁶⁷ which was established some months after this Inquiry.

7.2 Media Relations

Public inquiries are called in response to a matter of public concern. Media interest is therefore expected. Since one of the purposes of public inquiries is to bring previously unknown facts and circumstances to light, media attention is also helpful and desirable. It is an important factor in public access to the proceedings. The Inquiry's communications coordinator/media relations officer had excellent relationships with the local and national media outlets and considerable public inquiry experience, and he was well acquainted with what media representatives required and expected.

Sometimes, local cable companies or television networks choose to cover inquiry proceedings from start to finish. As this was not the case for the Ipperwash Inquiry, we arranged for broadcast-quality taping of the hearings by a local audio-visual company, which served as a pool feed for the electronic media covering the hearings.⁶⁸ The Inquiry was regularly followed and reported on by the London television station, The New PL, and by the CTV affiliate, CKCO Kitchener. Soon after the hearings began, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) began to air a ninety-minute excerpt twice each week, in addition to periodic nightly newscasts. By the end of the hearings, the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) was also rebroadcasting some of the proceedings.

The print media, particularly the *Sarnia Observer* and the *London Free Press*, regularly covered the Inquiry. A reporter from the *Toronto Star* attended most of the proceedings, and the Inquiry had national coverage in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* from time to time.

Judges presiding over trials do not discuss the trials in the media, but given the very different function of commissioners of public inquiries, contact with

⁶⁶ Appendix 14(j), Commissioner's Remarks on Attendance and Cross-Examination, January 9, 2006.

⁶⁷ The Honourable G. Normand Glaude, Commissioner.

⁶⁸ See section 9.7 herein, Records of the Proceedings.

the media is not precluded for them. Nevertheless, because I was acutely aware of the importance of public perception of my objectivity throughout, I decided that my commission counsel would be responsible for meeting with the media and would be available for interviews or to answer questions whenever needed. However, commission counsel spoke on my behalf and had the same obligation as I did to be fair and objective. Prudently refraining from comment on the evidence anticipated or already called, commission counsel focused on the inquiry process and timetable and fulfilled this role ably and with professionalism.

I made public statements “from the bench” in Kimball Hall from time to time. Typically, the purpose was to communicate my decisions regarding procedural matters such as the location of the hearings, convey my views on progress of the Inquiry, or emphasize specific objectives with respect to the proceedings.⁶⁹ Our communications coordinator/media relations officer generally notified the media that I would be making such a statement, and the text was posted on our website (in addition to being included in the daily transcript).

7.3 Comments and Queries from the Public

Our website was intended to inform and educate the public about the Inquiry, and also to serve as the means through which the public could direct questions, comments, and personal perspectives to the Inquiry. The “feedback” link was routed to my executive assistant’s email in-box. It was her responsibility to provide the information requested, and to convey to me and to commission counsel any perspectives offered in this way. Individuals who requested information could thus expect a reply. However, we did not respond (except to acknowledge receipt) to opinions offered with respect to the events surrounding the death of Dudley George, witness testimony, or to any other matter on which I might make a finding or recommendation in my report.

⁶⁹ Appendix 14, Commissioner’s Statements.

