

Energy Institute appoints First Nations representative

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FREDERICTON - The New Brunswick Energy Institute has returned First Nations representation to its scientific advisory council, filling the void left by an aboriginal member who resigned while criticizing the independent body's work.

The embattled institute has appointed Cecelia Brooks of St.Mary's First Nation, a trusted adviser of the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick, as its newest member.

The appointment comes roughly a month after the Telegraph-Journal reported Fred Metallic, a member of the Listuguj First Nations in Quebec near Campbellton, quit the body, stating it was "too preoccupied" with how the Tory government wanted it to respond to shale gas development. Metallic holds a PhD in environmental science and was also the institute's only aboriginal member.

David Besner, the interim chair of the New Brunswick Energy Institute, said on Friday that Brooks was selected on the recommendation of the assembly of First Nations chiefs.

Brooks also has an "extensive background in the initiation, facilitation and co-ordination of projects on environmental and indigenous knowledge studies with aboriginals." "A strong voice for aboriginal issues is imperative to scientific studies pertaining to energy development in our province," Besner said. "As we begin to move forward on selecting our research objectives, all members of the scientific advisory council look forward to working together with Ms. Brooks." Brooks has a bachelor of science in chemistry and biology from Tennessee-based Austin Peay State University and holds certifications in water and wastewater treatment.

She is the current research director and indigenous knowledge specialist with the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick and the "water grandmother" for the Canadian Rivers Institute.

In her role as water grandmother, she has worked on building awareness about water quality, conservation and wastewater treatment alternatives and to encourage educational opportunities for First Nations youth in the water and environmental sciences.

New Brunswick Energy Institute executive director Annie Daigle said on Friday that advisory council member Karen Kidd, a Canada Research Chair and a professor in the biology department at the University of New Brunswick Saint John, has previously worked with Brooks as a part of the Canadian Rivers Institute.

Daigle said the institute still has two vacant positions on the body's roundtable discussion group.

She said the aim is to have Mi'kmaq and Maliseet representation.

"We are hoping to move forward with that in the New Year," Daigle said. "We are hoping to be building better communications between the institute itself and First Nations as a whole." Brooks did not return calls for comment on Friday.

"Together we can provide all New Brunswickers with the factual information they need to understand issues relating to our province's energy future," Brooks said in a statement.

"I have dedicated my career's work to ensuring that our water supply is respected and remains safe for future generations, as well as to ensuring understanding and respect for indigenous issues." Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick endorsed the move.

"Ms.Brooks is a highly respected member of the First Nations community and brings a wealth of experience related to western environmental science and traditional indigenous knowledge," reads a statement from the

assembly.

Brooks will remain as an adviser to the chiefs as well.

"The appointment of Ms. Brooks to the energy institute does not impede the independence of the chiefs to make decisions regarding natural resource development in the traditional territories of the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq people," the chiefs stated. "It is hoped that the appointment will strengthen the voice of aboriginal people in the development of energy projects in New Brunswick." The appointment comes as the institute is aiming to push ahead with its scientific work in the aftermath of two resignations from its leadership.

The institute is hoping to start anew and leave behind the controversy surrounding the academic credentials of its former chair Louis LaPierre and his subsequent resignation as well as Metallic's resignation.