

I travelled to the Shallow Lake/ Hepworth Legion on the morning of Saturday, April 27 to listen to concerned citizens from Grey and Bruce who had gathered to comment on the Commercial Fishing Agreement signed between the Saugeen First Nation (SON) and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). We don't see many of these Town Hall meetings in our fast moving society these days but the coming together of 200 citizens to express their concerns on an issue of the day is a fine example of how democracy is supposed to work.

In a calm polite manner individuals, approached the microphone and expressed their frustration and concerns regarding the fishing treaty. The overall defining concern was the feeling that the non-Natives with a vested interest in the recreational fishery of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay were not consulted, nor involved in any way in the negotiations even though there had been a promise following the last negotiation to ensure such public involvement in the process.

Each speaker expressed his/her concerns on a variety of issues. One speaker expressed his safety concern with having gill nets in the Harbour. His downriggers have been entangled in ghost nets twice, once he narrowly escaping a serious consequence. Another speaker referred to the nets as a 7 mile long "Wall of Death" and spoke to a number of studies that showed the destruction of shore birds populations like loons and diving ducks. A Colpoys Bay angler spoke of unattended nets, the fish going to waste, of nets set on 30 feet of water and off river mouths in spawning season. Another speaker handed out documentation on the abuse of the quota system in the last agreement which showed in one case of overfishing of quota by some 1000% and no reporting at all of the incidental catch. The incidental catch being the salmon, walleye, rainbow and brown trout that our local sports clubs have spent so much time, money and effort enhancing populations and creating a world class fishery. A number of business owners decried the loss of economy from tourism should the recreational fishery decrease as expected. Several anglers sited examples of northern lakes like Nipissing and Nipigon where commercial netting is destroying the recreational fishery. Several speakers pointed out that the seemingly special treatment of Natives by the courts, the police and government does nothing to bring an end to racism but in fact exasperates the issue.

As if orchestrated at the end of the comment period the assembly was pontificated by a Liberal pseudo-intellectual who told everyone in attendance that the fishing agreement was a done deal and we, the great unwashed, have no recourse but to accept thing as as they are. There will be no renegotiation, no appeal of Native rights as sited in the Fairgrave decision and regardless of the fact that we may see the agreement as unfair and harmful to the recreational fishery we must accept the agreement as law and move on. But hold on a second the negotiated fiasco between the MNR and the SON is not how laws are to be created in a democracy

I am a Canadian citizen and as such **I do not see this deal as fair, equitable or democratic.** *Democracy is defined as a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Democracy allows eligible citizens to participate equally—either directly or through elected representatives—in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination.* The Saugeen First Nation gets to vote on the ratification of the agreement. Why do we, the non-Native population not have a chance to participate in the process and vote or at least have our elected representatives vote to ratify or reject the agreement. I am disgusted that this Liberal government and its bumbling bureaucrats have created and supported this fiasco of an agreement. If you consider this agreement to be unfair take time to study the Algonquin Treaty in Eastern Ontario in which the Liberal government is giving away 1/7 of Ontario.

To not object to the treaties and the process that created them is to allow bureaucrats to make law. To not demand a full accounting from government of these agreements is to silently collude in a massive fraud on all future Canadians.

Gaye Smith