

MPP focuses on 3 areas of fishing deal

Editor:

I am writing to your readers, and our community to provide some context regarding the recent MNR Commercial Fishing Agreement and to clarify my position.

The reality is there are three key areas of focus related to this matter that need to be communicated.

Let me state outright that I was not invited to participate, nor even made aware of the recently announced negotiations between the MNR and SON. The reality is that the Liberal government conducted the negotiations and approved the agreement. I was made aware of this agreement when the press release was made public and the ink was barely dry on a new agreement.

I have continually expressed my disappointment about not being involved in the discussions, also pointing to my disappointment that the local sportsmen's associations were not part of the consultation. It was inappropriate that neither I nor the sportsmen's associations were consulted or involved in discussions and I have expressed this disappointment directly to the Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. David Orazietti.

Secondly, I am very concerned about the potentially negative impact the terms and conditions of the agreement may have on both the local fishery and the greater tourism economy of our area.

I have been advised that some fisherman have indicated they will not be coming to the area to fish. To quote: "They do not wish to be involved in the negative environment, and also advise they are concerned about safety and the reality that there will be limited fishing opportunities. They will simply go elsewhere." This is not a good omen. If the commercial boats do indeed venture into the inner harbours and thus potentially deplete the fish stock available, what is the

reality of anyone attending community events such as the annual Salmon Spectacular? The sport fishery in past has been a huge economic resource to our area. If lost, this would and will be a devastating blow to our entire region.

If the spirit of intent is, as suggested by SON, sincere (that is to sustain the fish stocks), I would suggest the two fisheries, commercial and sport/recreational, can co-exist. For many years there was a commercial fishery that thrived alongside the sport/recreational fishery. If the commercial nets remain at a distance outside of the inner harbours, it is my understanding that both could co-exist successfully. I sincerely hope this will be the reality.

Thirdly, in regard to the funding provided within the terms of this agreement (\$850,000 over five years), had I been involved in the discussion, I would have offered some alternatives, i.e. hiring a Conservation Officer for our area that could provide some of the services required, while also ensuring there is enforcement and conservation efforts being implemented; this would have also addressed some of the safety concerns being raised. This could have been a win-win for everyone. SON would be deemed to be willing to work in concert with the sportsmen's associations, safety and conservation would have been served for all, and the MNR would have improved the provision of service to all taxpayers.

I would have suggested that the nets remain a minimum of one kilometre from the inner harbour designation point for the first year and that the amount of allowable catch be set based on this actual catch. I would have further suggested the total weight of total sport fish caught in the nets be deducted from the total allowable catch and that the sportsmen's associations be compensated accordingly in an effort to reflect the time and resources they invest in

this important asset of the overall fishery environment.

Both MP Larry Miller and I have tried to make people aware of the matter in the hope that the MNR would reconsider and be willing to have further discussions with the local sportsmen's associations, so as to avoid the potential situation that in all likelihood may happen. We are most concerned with the process (or lack thereof) and the fact the MNR did not allow all stakeholders to be involved in the process.

Please be assured that it is my intent to continue to push the minister to reconsider, or at the very least, to put additional conditions in place to protect the local sport/recreational fishing industry. The sad reality is the current Liberal government continues to govern as if it has a majority and as is the case with many current initiatives (e.g. wind turbines and the Green Energy Act, decimation of horse-racing industry, tire stewardship fee increases, etc.,) whereby they merely steam-roll ahead without any discussion or consultation with my party (the Progressive Conservatives/Official Opposition) or members of the third party (the NDP).

I hope this reply has helped provide additional context and a clearer picture of the matter from my perspective. I wish I was consulted by the Liberal government on issues facing my riding and my constituents, and more importantly that I could have influenced the Liberal government to have arrived at an agreement that would have served all stakeholders more effectively. I remain committed to fighting for our community and the livelihood of our fishing community. Please do not hesitate to pick up the phone or send me an e-mail should you wish to speak further about this matter or any other provincial concerns.

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