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NEWS LOCAL

Miller calls fishing agreement a mess



By Denis Langlois, Sun Times, Owen Sound
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Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Conservative MP Larry Miller

Allowing commercial fishing in Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay is a "slap in the face" to local sportsmen's groups and others who support the recreational fishing industry, says MP Larry

Miller.

"I am very disappointed," the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Conservative politician said in an interview Tuesday.

He said based on the information released, the new commercial fishing agreement between the provincial government and Saugeen Ojibway Nation is a "mess."

Proper consultation did not take place, he said. "This thing has not been handled right. People are very frustrated right now."

The deal could lead to "more dissension" on the water as recreational and commercial fishermen attempt to coexist on Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay.

He said there is "lots of room" in Georgian Bay for both sports and commercial fishing, but the two bays are not the place.

Sports groups, like the Sydenham Sportsmen's Association, do a "tremendous amount of work" to stock the bays with fish to support the sports fishery, he said.

Commercial fishing in the bays will hurt the sports fishery and events like the Salmon Spectacular, he said.

Miller said he plans to meet with local fishing groups and others to hear their concerns. He said he also hopes Cape Croker Chief Scott Lee will return his telephone calls.

The Ministry of Natural Resources announced in a news release Monday that the province and Saugeen Ojibway Nation have signed a new five-year agreement which will allow commercial fishing to "resume in Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay on April 26, 2013, and continue year round over the term of the agreement."

The MNR says the agreement will also contain measures to allow commercial and recreational fishing to coexist in the two bays.

The province says both the MNR and SON will monitor commercial fishing and recreational use in Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay and will meet in October to make sure both commercial and recreational anglers can continue to safely coexist while maintaining a sustainable fishery.

According to a background document from the MNR, nets will be marked "in an effective and standard manner that will be communicated to all recreational boaters" and will not be longer than 300 metres.

To cut down on catches of trout and salmon — species raised in hatcheries by local sports fishing clubs — nets set in the two bays will have a mesh size of 4.5 inches or greater and have a maximum height of 50 rows of mesh, the MNR says.

During March, April, October and November, commercial fishermen will make best efforts not to set nets within a one-kilometre radius of the mouths of Bothwells Creek, Colpoys Creek, Waterton Creek, Keefers Creek and Gleason Brook to protect spawning salmon and rainbow trout.

Miller said the use of the words "best effort" are a concern. "Those kinds of words mean there's nothing concrete," he said.

The agreement covers waters surrounding the Bruce Peninsula from Point Clark in the main basin of Lake Huron to the international border and around the Bruce Peninsula into Georgian Bay to Craigeith. This area is recognized by SON as its traditional waters.

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