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Miller, Walker condemn payments to SON



By Scott Dunn, Sun Times, Owen Sound
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Larry Miller

An \$850,000 payment over five years to Saugeen Ojibway Nation under the latest native commercial fishing agreement announced this week drew cries from Bruce-Grey-Owen

Sound Conservative MP Larry Miller and Progressive Conservative MPP Bill Walker on Wednesday.

The pair issued a joint news release condemning the annual payments to be made on a sliding scale starting at \$250,000 in the fiscal year ended this March and dropping to \$100,000 in the year ending March 2017.

Details about the agreement announced Monday were made public Tuesday.

Walker warned Monday that by allowing native commercial fishing nets into Colpoys and Owen Sound bays, local sports fishing and tourism opportunities could be destroyed.

Wednesday he went further.

“Not only are vessels being put in the bays where local sport fishers love to fish, but they are being paid to be there. This is very upsetting,” Walker said in the release, adding he wondered where the provincial government would find the money.

Miller said Wednesday “I am deeply disappointed in learning the details and hidden aspects of this new agreement that will no doubt kill local sport fishing in these bays.

“When I found out that commercial fishing rights were being granted I felt it was a slam against local recreational fishers, after reviewing the agreement and finding out that about \$850,000 will be provided by the province, I feel as though this is a complete insult and a shameful act by the ministry.”

The new 40-page, five-year agreement, which runs until Feb. 25, 2018, contains many detail which will be digested in the coming days. But the Ministry of Natural Resources highlighted one key change when announcing the new agreement — that native commercial fishermen may set nets in Owen Sound and Colpoys bays year-round starting April 26.

While the last agreement was in effect native nets were pulled back during the annual Salmon Spectacular fishing derby in August so as not to interfere with sports fishing during the derbies as was seen in the past.

Repeated efforts seeking comment from the chiefs of Saugeen Ojibway Nation since Monday have been unsuccessful. Mike Morencie, director of the fish and wildlife services branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources, responded Wednesday to questions raised by Walker and Miller.

“The SON have a court-affirmed sustenance commercial fishing right to be in those waters,” Morencie said. “The SON is not being paid to fish. The payments are for the assessment and doing all the data collection for that fishery and their fishery,” said Morencie, who was part of the team which negotiated the agreement for the MNR.

Jessica Spindler, in the office of the minister of natural resources, followed up by e-mail on the payments calling the money “implementation funding.”

The money will be spent ensuring effective governance, setting safe harvest levels, ensuring compliance with the agreement, collaborating on effective public communication, review of stocking programs potentially affecting the waters defined in the fishing agreement, economic benefits and capacity for SON, she wrote.

The new agreement also allows for consideration of further spending beyond the \$850,000 over five years but funding won't be guaranteed, Morencie said. He noted the money is coming from the MNR's fish and wildlife branch budget, not from a separate account comprised of hunting and fishing licence revenue.

Morencie wouldn't say how much money was provided to SON in or outside of the previous two commercial fishing agreements struck in 2000 and 2005. He said that's because they were never made public. That lack of disclosure is something Miller and former MPP Bill Murdoch have fought through a freedom of information request, while both native communities comprising SON have opposed those efforts.

Walker said Wednesday it's ironic local volunteer sport fishing groups receive at most \$10,000 for stocking programs when the fishing agreement provides \$850,000 to SON.

Morencie agreed but said that's not the whole story. “I spend I don't know how many millions of dollars raising fish for stocking in water bodies right across the province. We raise and stock throughout this province about 8.5 million fish at various life stages to many water bodies, like hundreds of water bodies,” including lake trout for Lake Huron.

The ministry also provides fish eggs to some clubs and has another program which provide funds.

The fishing agreement also directly addresses native commercial fishing concerns that stocked fish may be harming the commercial fishery. The agreement provides for a fish stocking working group to study the science around the claims.

“We're going to have a look at it,” he said. “We're also doing a broader stocking plan on Lake Huron, where all the clubs and all the recreational folks have been engaged and provided input already to date. So we're going to marry the two of them up.”

Asked if this could lead to the end of fish stocking in the territorial waters of SON, Morencie said he doubted it.

“The outcome is still yet to be determined but my personal opinion is no, stocking will not stop. It may be at different levels. I’m presupposing an outcome and I prefer not to do that.” The agreement provides for the creation of a governance committee, working groups which will make recommendations to it, including total allowable catch limits, stocking, communication/education and economic development.

Data exchange provisions are included, the agreement says, to “ensure the sustainability of the fishery, to ensure the parties’ mutual responsibility for fisheries assessment work and to assess the TAC,” or total allowable catch.

The MNR agrees to exchange annual Lake Huron lake-wide harvest data from commercial fishermen who are not SON members and, to the extent available, from recreational anglers, the agreement says.

SON agrees its commercial fishermen shall report to SON their daily catch for all species and their fishing effort, including location of catch, gear type and the length of time nets were set. The SON agrees to share that information with the MNR in accordance with a process set out by the governance committee under Schedule D, which covers total allowable catches and data exchanges.

The agreement also contains a dispute resolution process and stipulations concerning data exchange, compliance and funding.

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Ratzshite

We can't even get money to dredge are harbour but they find \$170,000 a year to pay SON to fish it. But hey at least the new car dealerships in are area will sell some new trucks in the next five years.

1 hour ago 1 Like  Flag

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newsboy_101

Both the Federal and Provincial governments need to address these treaties with First Nations. These decisions like this

present situation regarding commercial fishing rights only creates further anger and animosity towards these people. Tax payers are fed up and tired of the continuous handouts the First Nations receive. If we continue down this road its only a matter of time before some serious confrontation occurs. Politicians need look no further then themselves when they ask why did such an event happen.

I will not be purchasing another fishing license to fish in Georgian Bay. The MNR can fine me or what ever.

Its time we stand up to these ridiculous treaties. My rights are equal to their rights. They may have been here before my ancestors, but my ancestors made this country what it is today.

4 hours ago 8 Likes  Flag

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hstsucs

You are sadly mistaken if you think your rights are equal to their's. Its been proven in the courts hundreds of times. The cops always side with the indians.Try setting up a smoke shack and sell smokes, booze and firecrackers at the end of your lane.

48 minutes ago in reply to newsboy_101  Flag

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Don Russell

Enough is enough with the Native crap Why do i have to pay to go fishing when the Fish Club I belong to does all the work at stocking and raising fish only to be released and captured by nets? MY, I will no longer buy a fishing permit, let the law come down Mr. MNR and Govt.! And all the other big dollar spenders who look after the Natives before the older pensioners who worked and paid taxes to support these bands of "Natives" I was born in this Country, where is my Treaty, Soft shelled govt. political weaklings.They get the GOLD MINE and we get the Shaft ! Again! Protest people.

10 hours ago 9 Likes  Flag

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Harold Reid

Good News ... Don, if you are a retiree age 65, you do not require a fishing permit and might I add, dragging an anchor through these waters may have an effect on future fishing ... if you get my drift ?

1 hour ago in reply to Don Russell 2 Likes  Flag

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hstsucs

Great, in another 20 years I'll be old enough to fish in a fished out hole for free.

45 minutes ago in reply to Harold Reid  Flag

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