

# Town had no say in fishing accord

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The new commercial fishing agreement between the Saugeen Ojibway Nation and the Ministry of Natural Resources caught the mayor of South Bruce Peninsula by surprise.

John Close said at a council meeting Tuesday the town was not involved in any negotiations in the new deal despite the municipality being directly affected by the agreement as it is bordered on two sides by the waters the accord covers.

"I wish we would have been involved in the discussions, allowed to express our concerns and listened to their concerns," Close said. "Because it was done behind closed doors it certainly raises a lot of questions right

now and we are not sure we are going to get any answers."

A new five-year agreement between the SON and the MNR was announced March 11. One key change in the agreement highlighted by the MNR was 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.

The new agreement, which runs until Feb. 25, 2018, has been criticized by sports anglers as well as Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP Larry Miller and MPP Bill Walker.

The new agreement also includes an \$850,000 payment

to SON to be spent ensuring effective governance, setting safe harvest levels, ensuring compliance with the agreement, collaborating on effective communication, review of stocking programs potentially affecting the waters defined in the fishing agreement, economic benefits and capacity for SON, an MNR official told The Sun Times.

Close said he would like to go through the agreement fully before he forms an opinion on it, but he does have a lot of questions on how the agreement was reached and will be looking to Walker to help the municipality get some answers from the province.

"It's concerning to us so we would like some answers," said Close.

Representatives of the Bruce

Peninsula Sportsmen's Club were at Tuesday's council meeting to discuss concerns about low water levels and the effect it is having on recreational boating in the community.

Club director Stu Paterson, who emphasized he was not speaking for the club but as an avid angler, said it is also concerning to him an agreement was reached without talking to the local groups and municipalities.

"There was very little discussion with all these stakeholders and this was just rammed down our throats and we are not happy," said Paterson.

The veteran angler said his concerns aren't with the First Nations commercial fishermen, but he had some harsh words for the provincial government.

"It appears that the Ontario government is about to wipe out about 40 years of stocking of sports fish and that seems to be the bottom line," said Paterson.

The Bruce Peninsula club raises and stocks about 150,000 rainbow trout and 300,000 brown trout each year. In the past 20 years the hatchery has stocked more than four million fish.

"This agreement seems well on its way to wiping out 40 years of fish stocking by volunteers working hard all year, fin clipping, collecting eggs, et cetera," Paterson said.

Paterson said there is already fear that anglers from outside the area will stop coming to the region to fish.