

Exposing the 'mink' stink?

To: Hon. John MacDonell, Agriculture Minister and Hon. Sterling Belliveau, Environment Minister

Dear Ministers:

It has been nine months now since the new 'Fur Industry Regulations' were enacted. Part of the scheme, we were told, involved the hiring and training of an undetermined number of Agriculture Department inspectors supposedly dedicated to the oversight and enforcement of these new rules.

As I said, it has been nine months. Have these people been hired? Trained? Deployed in the field? If so, what are they doing?

Sadly, one thing they are not doing is curtailing the mink waste which continues to flow unabated into some lakes and rivers in SW Nova Scotia, a situation which is, arguably, the original impetus for the writing of the new rules (never mind the fact that several federal and provincial environmental statutes had already existed to prevent such activity, but were not being enforced).

As the toxins spread and more and more waterways are becoming affected (or is it infected?), the mystery deepens. Why is this highly illegal pollution allowed to continue, with neither Agriculture nor Environment raising a finger?

From what I hear from residents in the affected area, if they complain to Environment, they're told to tell Agriculture about the problem. When they go to Agriculture, they're directed back to Environment. All this suggests some kind of disconnect between the two agencies, an administrative schism that prevents any regulatory action. Now, Ministers, is this any way to manage an industry with a long history of environmental abuse?

Is there no way that between the two of you something can be worked out so that the mink industry pollution actually gets stopped, and possibly even some punishments meted out to the guilty? No doubt this industry contributes heavily to various re-election campaigns and party fundraisers, but even so, must they get a free pass forever? Are the residents down there expected to out-bid the mink industry in financial support to the New Democratic Party in order to get any action? If so, that's a new low even for Nova Scotia politics and a serious affront to democracy.

Will it take something like a national news story to embarrass both departments into long-overdue action?

Provincial (and federal) regulations are being broken, the science has been done to demonstrate real environmental harm, there is loud and long protest from many affected citizens, there is talk of lawsuits, yet nothing happens. Forgive me, but it makes one wonder if there is something the public is not being told.

Can either or both of you Ministers assure me, and many other long-suffering citizens, that swift and appropriate action will be taken to correct this issue once and for all? I don't mean fixing the lakes and rivers - I realize the damage has been done, these waterways are going to stay dead for a long time, but is it too much to ask that the ongoing pollution be stopped now?

You have the complaints logged - there have been phone calls, letters and emails. You have your own field staff. Go to www.minkstink.com if you want some documentary evidence.

It's all there. All we tax-paying citizens need is for you two to figure out how to get this done.

Please get back to me about this at your earliest conveniences. A lot of people are waiting for answers.

Frank Thomas,

Middleton, NS