

**BILL 53 – An Act Respecting the Fur Industry  
“Fur Industry Act”**

**Presentation by: Simeon Roberts, Coordinator/Consultant, Nova Scotia Mink Breeders Association (NSMBA) to Standing Committee on Law Amendments, May 5, 2010.**

Thank you Mr. Chair, it is a great pleasure being here today representing the Nova Scotia Mink Breeders Association. I have been working with the Association as its Coordinator and Consultant for over two years.

The Nova Scotia Mink Breeders Association has been registered with the Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stock Companies since 1977 as a society and is comprised of farmer members and a volunteer Board of Directors that has established itself as Canada’s leading producer of mink.

Our mission is to facilitate the continued viability, profitability, and economic contribution of the mink industry to Nova Scotia.

This unique foundation is the base from which we serve our members and represent their interests.

It is therefore a pleasure being with you today and speaking on behalf of mink farmers in our Province in support of Bill 53.

Actually, the Minister of Agriculture chose probably the worst time of year to table this Bill, as this is the time when our mink are having their kits.

As you have already heard in the House, Nova Scotia has a rich history of mink farming dating back to the 1930’s when mink farms were first established. Today, there are over 150 farms and upwards of 2,000 people directly employed in the mink sector which is primarily comprised of sophisticated farms and networks that directly contribute over \$100 million to the provincial economy. Actually this figure may expand as this years prices will likely be higher. Many are small family farms although we do have some larger operations such as Willowdale Farms in Berwick, Kings County which employs 65-70 people and has a payroll of almost \$3 million.

This, and the growing annual production of high quality black mink pelts, is clear proof that Nova Scotia offers a number of comparative advantages to farming mink.

This past season we will have produced close to 1.7 million pelts. This is over half of all of Canada's production.

Compare this to Denmark which is the world leader. They produce almost 13 million pelts. And recall, Denmark has a population of about 5 ½ million people and have a land area that's 10,000 square kilometres less than ours.

The mink industry is now the largest agricultural sector in our province, in fact I stand to be corrected but I think it's about 1/5<sup>th</sup> of all agriculture. The monies generated from sales are all export dollars not recycled money. China, Russia, South Korea and Greece are our main markets. We are generating spinoff economic activity to the tune of almost ½ billion dollars.

Our industry is a vital part of many of our rural communities and generates many spinoffs and jobs in areas that are currently facing economic hardship.

Mink farms are prominent in Digby County and Yarmouth County. In fact 80% of Nova Scotia's mink are raised in these two counties. Due to the dense population of mink ranches, a pelting facility was constructed in Digby County to service the large industry. Mink do not have to be shipped long distances to a pelting plant. This facility also serves the other Maritime Provinces and provides 180 jobs to the area.

Many of our farms have a long history and tradition, being run by prominent families. These extended families give back to the community in many ways and are an important part of the economic, social and cultural fabric of our rural areas.

We are also seeing growth in many new areas as other agricultural sectors are dying. New entrants are young farmers who want to make a living here in Nova Scotia.

So you can see our industry is viable and profitable.

It can be an exciting and rewarding business to be in but challenging at the same time.

Our industry is very concerned about the increased incidence of Aleutian Disease (or AD as it is commonly known), and this is hampering our sustainability.

There are a number of organizations offering support services to Nova Scotia Mink producers. AgraPoint and the NS Department of Agriculture have extension services in place to work with producers. Other support services include Aleutian Disease blood testing which is offered through the Weymouth AD Laboratory which is now managed by our Association and is housed in the local school – in 2009 857,946 tests were done (4.07% were positive compared to 3.51% for 2008).

Nova Scotia is also home to centralized feed facilities that provide low priced, high protein feed to mink farms. Many mink diets include fish waste, which is available in Nova Scotia and provides an excellent source of protein for mink – so we are turning a waste product into feed for the farms.

However, access to a reliable and cost effective source of feed still remains an issue for our industry.

We are also developing ways to turn farm waste into salable compost and energy biomass.

Our industry also receives support from the Nova Scotia Fur Institute, the Fur Council of Canada and the Fur Institute of Canada. These key organizations exist to promote research and development; sustainable and humane fur farming practices, communication and international relations programs, and funding to pursue industry-related projects.

The Canadian industry is also updating its “Codes of Practice” for the care and handling of mink to reflect current ideology and formulating initiatives that will allow the industry to be a leader globally, withstand global corrections and improve its ability to compete with other fur producing countries.

Nova Scotia also boasts a robust and diverse research and development infrastructure. Operated by highly skilled professionals, this infrastructure provides valuable research and international networks, plus a broad range of facilities and services to the agriculture industry. In particular, the Nova Scotia Agricultural College has an impressive number of research institutes. For example, the Canadian Centre for Fur Animal Research provides valuable knowledge and expertise to the mink sector. There is also a major Aleutian Disease Research initiative supported by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) underway at the NSAC.

I've been fortunate enough to travel to Europe, and to Russia in particular and some of my colleagues have visited China, Denmark and Korea, and again we cannot help realize how fortunate we are here in Nova Scotia. We certainly have a comparative advantage.

We are also actively involved with the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture and I must say it's very sad to see what has been happening with agriculture as a whole in our Province. Many farmers are struggling and we often hear sad stories about those losing their livelihood. This all has an impact on our rural areas, their culture and way of life.

In our rural areas agriculture is often the mainstay of the local economy. It provides employment and creates important spinoffs which all help to sustain the rural lifestyle and communities we have all come to value.

But this landscape continues to dramatically change as we speak. Especially in South West Nova where the fishing and forestry sectors and now tourism, are all struggling to survive.

So despite all this doom and gloom, the mink sector still remains profitable and viable.

As I have already mentioned, our industry continues to grow.

According to an Economic Impact Study of the Mink Enterprise Industry in Nova Scotia by Canmac Economics in 2004, the sector represented one of the fastest growing economic sectors in Nova Scotia, with an annual average growth rate of 37.5% over the 1994-2003 period.

Some new entrants are converting unused agricultural facilities into new mink barns. Others are expanding production to meet increased demand and we continue to welcome and encourage such new development.

We have been forging links with government to see how we can work together more effectively to develop a comprehensive program that systematically and compassionately moves the industry forward.

We have been working with the Government over the last few years on new legislation for the mink industry and we are very pleased to see it being tabled in the House.

It's often a challenge working with government, but I must say it's been a welcome change working with the Department of Agriculture on this important piece of legislation. Staff have been excellent and their hard work should be commended.

I believe that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, government will become more and more important than ever in preparing Nova Scotians to succeed in a very competitive global marketplace.

We welcome any developments that will help to secure a sustainable future for our industry.

The long-term prosperity of our agricultural sector is important. It's important because it can secure a bright future for all Nova Scotians.

This legislation puts in place measures to ensure the appropriate management and development of the industry for years to come.

This legislation is important because it ensures our industry will develop in a sound way, contribute to the tax base of this province, and at the same time respect our neighbours.

This is very important because it will keep conflicts from arising which might harm the ability of our industry to exist and grow.

In particular, we are pleased that measures will be put in place that address many of the issues mink farmers have been facing.

In the short-term, we recognize that many of our farmers will have challenges as we move ahead with this legislation. But, in the long-term we feel it will benefit everyone.

We are looking forward to non-partisan support on this legislation and we believe it addresses the public interest and many issues that have been previously raised.

Thank you....