



# SIERRA CLUB ATLANTIC

**MAY 6, 2010**

**RE: New Fur Industry Act, Bill 53 and Upcoming Changes to NS Agricultural Policy**

**To Members of the Nova Scotia Law Amendments Committee:**

We are writing to submit recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the proposed Fur Industry Act, Bill 53. We were shocked at the speed with which Bill 53 came before the Law Amendments Committee, and would like to request the committee consider reconvening to allow community groups and concerned citizens to present their concerns regarding this Bill.

As the new Fur Industry Act and accompanying standards are created, and as new policies for the entire agricultural sector are developed this year, it is very important that the Department of Agriculture and the government consults with Nova Scotians regarding these changes. Decisions made regarding agricultural policy affect not only the agricultural industry, but also the food security, health, ghg emissions, water quality, and quality of life for all Nova Scotians. Best use of agricultural land will also help us adapt to emerging climate change impacts.

The NDP government committed to increasing the use of full cost accounting (such as the Genuine Progress Index) in its analysis of decisions before the last election. A full cost accounting of the fur farm industry would include placing a value on energy and water consumed, air and water pollution, and cost of loss of property values. We strongly encourage the Department to assess the full cost of this industry. This is important because current policies focus solely of cash revenues from export of mink fur while discounting these other external costs, which we pay as a society.

We would like to take this opportunity to formally submit our recommendations regarding the proposed Fur Industry Act, Bill 53:

- Department of Agriculture should promote agriculture production that will enhance the ability of Nova Scotians to adopt a low impact diet, decrease the use of pesticides and over-use of fertilizers, and adapt to climate impacts. The organic food industry is a good model of a growth industry than should be receiving support from the Department.
- Adopt a full cost accounting approach to measuring the true value of fur farming to Nova Scotian economy, environment and society.
- Increase consultation on legislation such as this to include communities, civil society, and municipal leaders. As we discussed in our meeting with Departmental staff on April 1, consultation takes time and can be expensive. However, there are ways to do efficient and effective consultations, and there is incredible capacity within local groups and universities regarding effective consultation processes. As the Department moves toward developing a

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comprehensive agricultural policy and as we move beyond legislation to developing standards for the fur farm industry, we hope that lessons learned during this process will be implemented, and staff will be given opportunity to develop clear and efficient consultation processes.

- Monitoring and enforcement of the fur farm industry should be housed within the Department of the Environment (DOE). This will create clarity for industry and eliminate problems of conflict of interest bound to arise if the Department tasked with promoting industry is also tasked with monitoring its environmental performance. In addition, we feel that staff in the DOE have greater expertise in environmental monitoring, and thus could perform this task more efficiently and effectively than those unfamiliar with environmental monitoring.
- The reason for the rapid development of the Fur Industry Act was public concern about the contamination of water and soil created by waste generated by fur farms. However, Bill 53 contains no independent appeals process for communities and individuals to appeal permits and operating licenses. An independent appeals process must be established in the Act.
- The Act explicitly states that the Minister can provide funds to organizations wishing to promote mink farming. This provision should be removed for several reasons: first, the mink industry farm receipts are increasing, so this area of our agricultural sector does not need subsidies (while other sectors desperately need support); second, no money should be poured into this industry until a full cost accounting has been done; and third, given the lack of funding to other necessities such as health care and education, the government should be focusing on reducing unnecessary spending.
- Ensure proposed legislation is in line with current laws aimed at protecting the environment and communities' right to plan for sustainable development and water security. For instance, Environment Act, Environmental Assessment, Act, Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, and Municipal Government Act are important existing legislations that must be upheld and coordinated in any new legislation. The Fur Industry Act should be explicitly amended so that the Environment Act, the Environment Assessment Act, and the Municipal Government Act supercede the powers of the Bill.
- Compared with other domesticated animals, mink have been farmed relatively recently in their evolutionary history. According to a review performed by Nimon and Broom, (*Animal Welfare*, 1999. 8: 205-228), "[t]his renders it highly unlikely that all of their requirements for good welfare in captivity will have been identified". The welfare of farmed mink should be ensured, including access to water for swimming. Physiological studies on farmed mink (after approximately 70 generations in captivity) indicate that farmed mink continue to require access to water for swimming. When deprived of this access, mink displayed stress levels statistically indistinguishable from stress levels created by depriving mink of food (*Nature*, 2001. 410: 35-36). Any standards developed should incorporate access to water for swimming for farmed mink. The European Union has developed detailed recommendations to ensure minimal welfare standards for mink and other animals farmed for fur: [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/international/out67\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/international/out67_en.pdf). For instance, the document recommends (amongst other measures):

The cages and management methods used for mink should be greatly improved because they result in: a mortality of mink kits of 20 percent; some significant morbidity problems; stereotypies often for long periods; fur biting or more serious self mutilation to the point of tail or limb loss. Changes in accommodation are needed in order to provide: sufficient environmental complexity and opportunities for investigation and exercise. Examples of normal mink behaviour that cannot be carried out in typical farm housing are running, climbing, and swimming.

Nova Scotia must ensure that its animal welfare standards are reviewed and upheld to incorporate concerns specific to mink farming.

- Public access to government decision-making processes is becoming more affordable to governments in the electronic age. We recommend the Bill require the creation of a public registry for information related to the permitting process, housed within the Department of Environment. On the registry, the public would have access to permit applications, mink farm plans, recommendations for mitigation, and ongoing monitoring results. Proprietary information could easily be omitted from this registry.

In closing, as the Nova Scotia government moves forward with developing new agricultural policies, we recommend close collaboration with the emerging Food Policy Congress and the non-governmental sector. This type of engagement will ensure that the agriculture sector grows in line with the needs of Nova Scotians for food security, safe drinking water, and a clean environment.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. We would like to reiterate our request that the Law Amendments Committee reconvene to hear directly from affected community groups and experts from the environmental non-governmental sector.

In lieu of re-convening, we would like a considered response from the Law Amendments Committee and the Department of Agriculture regarding this Bill and future consultations on the Fur Industry Act and its regulation as well as the broader re-visiting of agricultural policy for the province.

Sincerely,



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Director

**CC:**

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