

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Sadie Beaton, a resident of Kings County with many generations of settler history on Mi'kmaq lands here in Nova Scotia, and over two decades studying and engaging with environmental issues here. I am deeply concerned for liveable futures for all of our communities, including those of my own children, and would like to provide comments regarding Omnibus Bill 127.

In particular, I ask the Public Bills Committee to have clauses 14 and 15 struck from omnibus Bill 127, aka the PROTECTING NOVA SCOTIANS ACT. The proposed amendments to the Crown Lands Act should be removed on the basis that these amendments are unconstitutional, undemocratic, economically shortsighted, and an affront to provincial commitments to reconciliation and treaty. As many people are pointing out, these sections will not serve to protect anyone except for those specifically involved in short-term profit from industrial forestry practices, practices that deeply degrade the Wabanaki forest over the long term.

I am very concerned that this attempt to slip in last-minute amendments to the Crown Lands Act bypasses Mi'kmaq rights and responsibilities to use and care for their unceded lands- land which do not belong to "The Crown" but are to be collectively cared for by Mi'kmaq as rights holders. Changes to this Act would further disrespect these well-established and constitutionally-protected and Supreme-Court affirmed treaty rights. These Peace and Friendship treaties lay out a sacred and legally binding relationship which the Provincial government will presumably be publicly celebrating at annual Treaty Day ceremonies just two days from now.

The amendments must also be rejected because of how they more generally threaten peaceful use, enjoyment and protection of Nova Scotia's Wabanaki forests. Vague language in the wording of the amendments and ridiculously high penalties seem designed to intimidate everyday forest users, including a growing number of people who are rightly seeking to resist destructive forestry practices and assert more sustainable land relations. The proposed changes especially threaten further criminalization of Mi'kmaw community members practicing their treaty responsibilities on their own lands and waters, such as those camping and gathering medicine on sacred moose hunting lands at Tqamuoweye'katik, or 'Hunter's Mountain.'

Violating the enshrined rights of Mi'kmaw people to care for their lands and waters is illegal on many fronts and would likely trigger expensive legal proceedings, which the province will certainly lose.

The amendments could also target the important peaceful work of Nova Scotians erecting temporary structures near to logging roads as they work to caretake lands through activities like

documenting rare species that may be of interest or be mandated for provincial protection, activities that actually align with the overarching priority of the province's last Independent Forestry Review to protect and restore ecosystem health. While these kinds of activities may be framed as obstructive, they serve more stated public interests that this government is failing to provide, like increased public awareness and understanding of existing forest biodiversity, and the potential for Nova Scotians to align with their treaty responsibilities to ensure these forests stay healthy with unhindered access for Mi'kmaw rights holders.

This rushed amendment process also fails to provide for anything close to adequate time for communities and residents to share our input. In particular, of course, time has not been set aside for meaningful and respectful dialogue with Mi'kmaq communities, who hold inherent and treaty-affirmed responsibilities to ensure these lands are cared for for future generations.

This government has shown nothing but disregard for the health and sanctity of Mi'kmaq lands and waters during its time in office, paving the way for and lining the pockets of profit-driven extractive industries that threaten the long-term viability of liveable futures on these lands and waters. Mi'kmaq communities have cared very well for this place over many millennia and have never ceded their role in caretaking this place for future generations. We should be deeply grateful for their patience and continued efforts to steward the Wabanaki forests in ways that benefit all of us living here. We must respect Mi'kmaw rights to assert protection of these precious lands and waters, including those that we callously call "crown lands," as well as listening to the many Nova Scotians who have rightly pointed out what is becoming increasingly obvious, which is that building towards a healthy, vibrant Wabanaki forest has the potential provide us all so much more potential for a sustainable economic future than a quick buck for a few, and impoverished ecosystems for all that is left behind by industrial forestry operations.

Sincerely,

Sadie Beaton