



Too many politicians spoil the chowder

by Lisa Roberts

It has been my unfortunate observation that concern about the environment has become a luxury in these harsh economic and social times. It is something one thinks about after finding a job, paying off debts, and dealing with discrimination or marginalisation. What is sometimes forgotten are the links between our environmental, economic and social welfare. In fact, misguided government intervention for economic objectives has resulted in considerable environmental degradation. This is the case in Newfoundland, where the environmental disaster of the collapse of the northern cod stocks has had drastic social and economic consequences.

The northern cod stocks first reached crisis levels in the early 1970's, after years of excessive foreign fishing beyond Canadian patrolled waters. The Canadian government responded by instating a

200-mile limit. This effectively gave Canada sovereignty over almost all of the Grand Banks, one of the world's richest fishing grounds.

While protecting the Atlantic fishery's resource base was certainly an objective of this move, the government perceived potential economic gains as well. Rather than protecting the culturally-based and sustainable inshore fishery, the government encouraged and facilitated expansion of the fishery. Off-shore druggers, factory-freezer trawlers, and foreign fishing have resulted in the collapse of Newfoundland's social and economic mainstay. While increased catches brought short-lived prosperity to some communities and governments, they undermined the ability of the cod stocks to reproduce. The larger catches never indicated increasing or even healthy cod stocks, but only technical efficiency.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has only recently changed its policy of granting quotas greater than

those recommended by scientists in order to increase employment. This policy resulted in the number of people employed in the Atlantic provinces increasing by 20,000 between 1973-1992. As a direct consequence of the cod moratorium announced in July 1992, 19,000 fish-

Increased catches brought short-lived prosperity

ermen and plant workers have lost their way of life. Of the 10,000 jobs that were left, another 2,000 were eliminated in December with the announcement of the new fish quotas.

Any potential economic benefit from the extension of Canada's sovereignty to 200 miles has been completely nullified by the environmen-

tally unsustainable management of the Atlantic cod stocks. Many of the 20,000 people who became involved in the northern cod fishery after 1973 are now depending on the government compensation package at a cost to Canadians of \$500 million.

What is now being hailed as Newfoundland's saviour? More environmental degradation and bad economics, i.e., Hibernia. The environmental problems I have with this project are easy to understand. Once in full production, Hibernia will result in over 12,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually (the major greenhouse gas). Furthermore, Hibernia has a built-in potential for an oil spill greater than that of the Exxon Valdez right in the middle of the Grand Banks. (The northern cod stocks have an incredibly dismal future ahead.) Finally, this is continuance of a long-standing policy of most developed countries to subsidize conventional, unrenovable, and polluting sources of energy. Here the

bad environmental and economic decision-making merge. Our debt-ridden federal government has promised \$2.7 billion over the life of the project. This is certainly a conservative estimate, as the Canadian government still owns eighty-five per cent of Petro Canada, one of the partners in Hibernia. The Newfoundland government, which is planning to save \$5 million in the next fiscal year by clamping down on welfare payments, has also contributed millions to the project.

What will be the economic benefits for Newfoundlanders? Certainly no revenue until 1997. Even then Hibernia may not be profitable if the price per barrel is higher than world-market prices. The 3000 local jobs will be largely finished once the construction phase is done. Then we'll be left with a standing threat to what might once again be the economic and social backbone of our province... the fishery.

Make sense? I don't think so.

Harbour cleanup???

McNabs Island is the green jewel in the middle of our Harbour. It is one of the least appropriate places in Metro to locate a sewage treatment plant. Many cities benefit from large, natural island parks within their boundaries. Stanley Park in Vancouver, Toronto Island, and Mount Royal in Montreal are all invaluable tourism and recreation assets that would diminish those cities by their absence or destruction. It is inconceivable that the government or residents of these cities would put a sewage treatment plant in their park. And too, it is inconceivable that we would jeopardize the opportunity to have a world-class park in Metro.

Halifax Harbour Cleanup Inc. proposes siting the plant on an artificial island to be built on Ives Point of McNabs Island. This gravel point owned by the Canadian Parks Service is also part of the site of Fort Ives and very much a contiguous part of McNabs Island. HHCI plans call for enlarging this part of McNabs Island and then severing it from the main island by dredging a small channel. Apparently, this channel is HHCI's response to negative public reaction about putting the plant on McNabs.

HHCI is giving us very little for the money it is asking us to spend - \$400 million. It proposes only primary treatment. There are four objectionable substances in wastewater: floatables, toxics, nutrients, and disease organisms. Primary treatment is an "initial" level of wastewater treatment which removes most of the heavy solids that float and about half the nutrients suspended in the water. It does not remove any toxics. It reduces the amount of nutrients (organic matter) which eat up the ocean's oxygen by only 30 percent. In fact, the present plan might exacerbate the nutrient problem by concentrating in one spot the 38 million gallons a day that are now dispersed in some 40 outfalls throughout the Harbour.

Primary treatment is so ineffective at destroying disease organisms that the treated effluent requires disinfection before it is discharged into the receiving waters. Unfortunately HHCI plans to disinfect with chlorine, a chemical which has recently been recognised as one of the world's most serious pollution problems with side effects even in salt water.

So, in essence, HHCI's proposal will be effective in dealing with only

one of four harmful substances in wastewater, the heavy or floating solids. There will be modest positive effects on the nutrients that diminish oxygen supplies in the water. Pathogens will be destroyed but through a disinfection process that will introduce additional toxics into the Harbour. HHCI has no plans whatsoever to curb the most serious problem of all, the very toxic metals and chemicals that spew daily into the Harbour.

HHCI's outflow site is about halfway between McNabs Island and

Point Pleasant Park. The diffuser pipe will be located 500-1000 metres from the entrance to the inner harbour. The effluent will contain half of the suspended particles and all the toxins that were in the raw sewage before treatment. This puts a concentrated and toxic pollution source less than 2 km from swimming beaches: Black Rock Beach at Point Pleasant Park and Maugher's Beach, the pristine beach located on McNabs Island. Swimming in Metro is too limited to risk this.

The Metro Coalition has proposed proven biological systems of alternative treatment that would yield a higher level of water quality for less money. HHCI's proposal needs to pass the environmental review process, and then receive government approval before it can go ahead. The Federal-Provincial Environmental Review Panel is holding public hearing this week. Please attend, get informed, and make your opinion known. (taken from Harbour Views, March 1993 published by the Metro Coalition for Harbour Cleanup)

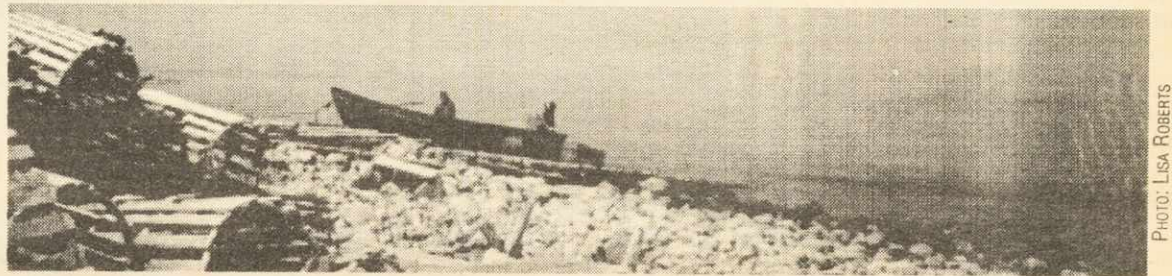


PHOTO: LISA ROBERTS

Public Hearing HHCI's Proposal for Sewage Treatment

Location: **Halifax Hilton**, 1181 Hollis St.

Monday, March 29

2-5 pm. (Control at Source/Sewer Rehabilitation)

7-10 pm. (Site Selection)

Tuesday, March 30

2-5 pm. (Collection System/ Construction Impacts)

7-10 pm. (General Session)

Thursday, April 1

2-5 pm. (Treatment Plant/ Artificial Island and McNabs Island)

7-10 pm. (Marine Environment)

Friday, April 2

2-5 pm. (Management and Operation of Facility)

Saturday, April 3

9-12 am. (General Session)

7-10 pm. (General Session/ Closing Statements)

