

Critics say fisheries minister in conflict

Belliveau, wife connected to aquaculture



Some critics say provincial Fisheries Minister Sterling Belliveau may be in a conflict of interest when it comes to aquaculture issues because his wife, Luella, is listed as president and director of Mr. Mussel's Seafarms Ltd., a Shelburne County company, now-defunct. (PETER PARSONS / Staff/ File)

Ocean aquaculture foes say provincial Fisheries Minister Sterling Belliveau may be in a conflict of interest when it comes to aquaculture issues.

Belliveau's wife, Luella, is listed as president and director of Mr. Mussel's Seafarms Ltd., a Shelburne County company, and the minister still holds a mussel seed drag collection licence from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Even though the company is not operating and the fishing licence is inactive, the connection between the Belliveaus and the fishing industry doesn't sit well with some watching Belliveau's aquaculture policies.

"The reality is he did not completely sell or dissolve the company . I think there is a concern with regard to the perception of a conflict of interest," Alex Patterson, a member of of St. Marys Bay Coastal Alliance, said Friday.

“The minister has recently come out with an aquaculture strategy, so this is a minister that is continuing to set the direction for aquaculture in Nova Scotia.”

In late 2009 and early 2010, it was reported that Belliveau, a former fisherman, sold fishing assets including a fishing licence, gear and boat and removed himself from the directorship of Mr. Mussel’s Seafarms Ltd.

While the Liberal opposition raised concerns about Belliveau being in a conflict of interest as fisheries minister before and during the sale, Belliveau said he consulted and followed all guidelines set out by the province’s conflict of interest commissioner.

That was confirmed by Justice Merlin Nunn, the conflict of interest commissioner, who dismissed a request by the Liberals to re-examine the issue.

On Friday, through a spokesman, Belliveau declined comment on the perceived conflict of interest issue.

“He feels this has been dealt with and he doesn’t understand why it is being raised again,” said Brett Loney, a spokesman for the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

“All this information was brought to the conflict of interest commissioner. He ruled on it.”

Loney said Mr. Mussel’s Seafarms Ltd.’s only asset “is a family property that was the home of Mr. Belliveau’s parents.”

“The company doesn’t own a licence. It doesn’t own a boat. It has no assets that are tied to the fisheries.”

Belliveau does hold a federal commercial mussel seed drag collection licence, Loney said.

“It’s a fishing licence,” he said. “It is not a licence for an aquaculture site. It is non-transferrable so it couldn’t be sold and it has been banked. It is inactive. It is not being used.”

Still, Patterson said a perception exists that Belliveau could one day go back to the aquaculture industry.

“I would have thought that the premier would be concerned about this from the point of view of ensuring that there is no perceived conflict of interest when

Minsiter Belliveau is making decisions about the future of aquaculture,” she said.

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