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PRESS RELEASE**

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**DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IGNORES YET ANOTHER COMMUNITY**

For the third time in four months, Keith Colwell, Nova Scotia's Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, has approved a finfish farm lease despite loud opposition from the very Nova Scotian community where the lease is located. "Liverpool, Port Mouton and now Ship Harbour have all had leases approved with total disregard for community input," says Wendy Watson Smith, President of the Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore, a member of the province-wide Healthy Bays Network.

After a massive fish die-off at the Ship Harbour site back in 2012, the license holder disappeared, leaving behind all their gear. "Eight years later and it's still there rotting away. What's changed to warrant this license's renewal?" asks Ms. Watson Smith.

Despite the checkered history at the Eastern Shore sites, two 20-year lease renewals (#0772 and #0833 on the NSDFA website) were granted by the Minister on May 29, 2020. However, his decision was only made public last week, three months after the fact. When asked about the delay a department representative explained that confidential proponent-government correspondence had to take place. "I guess the public isn't considered a valuable part of that dialogue," observes Ms. Watson Smith.

Forty-two organizations and individuals made submissions on the Owl's Head-Ship Harbour license renewal. Concerns included harbour pollution, escapes, and risks to the lobster fishery and local tourism. There are also concerns about the depth of the water, its flushing capacity, and the proponent's ability to protect surrounding habitat. Ministerial approval was granted with no baseline assessment, no production plan, no stocking information, no plan to deal with noise pollution, no plan for site maintenance and no plan for the removal of decommissioned gear or debris.

Community concerns were not the only ones ignored. In the process of studying the

area for a proposed Marine Protected Area, the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans noted that finfish farming is not compatible with the goals of a protected area, like biodiversity, wild salmon populations, delicate eelgrass beds and spawning areas, and support for the traditional fixed gear fishery.

Kris Hunter, program director with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, questions the validity of the license renewal process. “How can these sites possibly be approved when the proponents disappear, abandon their gear, and get a bye on due diligence? Not to mention the obvious issues regarding the placement of open net-pens in these bays.”

“The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture’s application of its laws and regulations is hopelessly opaque,” says the Healthy Bays Network’s Geoff LeBoutillier. “They shelter behind privacy laws, they manipulate the release of information and they dodge the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner. The end-result? They protect neither the environment nor our traditional fisheries. Based on the community’s submissions, clearly there is no social license to operate. Still, while the rest of the world moves to non-polluting, land-based closed containment aquaculture, here in Nova Scotia they are determined to expand the open net-pen industry. We call on Minister Colwell to suspend these licenses until such time that these issues can be addressed.”

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