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Who do they really work for? Has the Dexter government served you well?

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The purpose of the government is to protect the people and the environment and, in Nova Scotia, to provide good jobs to stem the emigration of our young people out of the Province. The government is supposed to work for the people, but who do they really work for?

Certainly the government hasn't provided jobs in open net aquaculture that would keep many young people here. Not with dead end jobs at \$10.93/hour doing repetitive work in a cold or refrigerated factory.

It didn't work in New Brunswick, even though the unemployment rate there is even higher than Nova Scotia's. Even Cooke Aquaculture has had to hire dozens of workers from Romania and the Philippines to work in their fish processing plant there. Now big aquaculture companies are turning to high speed, precise machines to keep their costs down and to produce a better product. Cooke Aquaculture has proudly automated much of its fish processing in New Brunswick and when they put in such a machine in Newfoundland, they cut the number of shifts in half, i.e., twice as many workers as before, at half the pay.

It appears the Dexter government has not learned any lessons about fish processing employment in New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

If the government were really interested in creating jobs, it would have insisted that all salmon grown in Nova Scotian waters must be processed in Nova Scotia, using existing idle processing plants. The Province could have done this years ago and could still do this now. Why don't they?

Instead, people are consistently fed the mantra about 400 or more new full time jobs for rural Nova Scotia from new fish farms. Unfortunately, the new processing plant schedule in Shelburne keeps slipping and is now put off until the end of 2015.

Simple math suggests that these 400 or more new jobs by the end of 2015 are also highly unlikely. Minister Belliveau - and now the NDP caucus - has promised that no new fish farm sites will be licensed until a major report on an improved regulatory system is completed by September, 2014.

That only leaves 16 months between the production of this report and the grand opening of the large fish processing plant in Shelburne. Even if a huge number of fish farm licenses were issued in September, 2014, even if all the fish cages were built and put in place, and even if about 18 million smolts grown in a fish hatchery ready to go on day one, the salmon would not be ready for harvesting until 2016, at the earliest.

The Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture would have to approve about 36 new sites - at half a million fish per site - in order to do this, all of which are to meet the new requirements of the September, 2014 report.

Until the new regulatory report is completed how can a meaningful regulatory review begin?

Is minister Belliveau the right person to be entrusted to create a significant increase in aquaculture employment when even all of his former senior staff has fled the department in the wake of a move to his riding? Two recent senior NSDFA replacements, Ms. Penfound and Mr. Muise, have now also moved on and the new chief of aquaculture is the former PR manager for the industry association

In addition to New Brunswick and Newfoundland, it appears that the Dexter government has not learned any lessons from Alberta either.

Alberta is booming with its population growing and money pouring in. One reason for this is that Alberta wisely collects a fee from large companies that make money from its natural resources. When the price of oil is C\$100/barrel Alberta collects a royalty rate on net revenue of 35.4%.

If the government of Nova Scotia imposed a similar 35.4% fee on the net revenue from open net finfish aquaculture it would have collected about \$11 million dollars since the NDP took office. Instead, it gave away \$25 million tax dollars and has not published the number of jobs this “gift” is supposed to produce and when.

If all the open net fish farms in Shelburne County were fully stocked, about 1.45 million fish on average, a Nova Scotian royalty fee of 35.4% would produce about \$3.1 million dollars per year, larger than the capital budget for the region.

This royalty fee could be imposed now! Why doesn't the Dexter government do this?

Cooke Aquaculture has been found guilty of illegally poisoning the waters of the Bay of Fundy and causing the death of thousands of lobsters. Outbreaks of infectious salmon anemia, ISA, have struck all over the Maritimes, including large losses here in Nova Scotia. The Province has not raised any objections to the unlabeled sale of these diseased fish, even though it threatens the acceptability of all food stuffs exported from Nova Scotia. Nor does the Province complain that the burden of paying the finfish aquaculture industry for its financial losses due to ISA and attacks of sea lice is placed on the backs of Nova Scotian and other Canadian citizens.

It seems that the Dexter government has struck a very bad business deal with big aquaculture with its outdated, polluting technology, offering hard-earned tax dollars to a company that, a short time later has attempted a hostile take over of Clearwater Seafoods, purchased a large aquaculture firm in Spain and engaged in bids to acquire another firm in Chile? Is this the partner the government is looking for to build a better life for its citizens?

If you think that the present government has served you well, then re-elect them. If you think that the present government has the wrong aquaculture business partner or hasn't imposed royalty fee requirements so that local citizens get “ a share of the pie”, if you worry about other environmental disasters like unregulated mink farms and all the pollution they produce, then support those who will work for you.

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<http://www.southcoasttoday.ca/content/editorial-who-do-they-really-work>