

Can Nova Scotia afford Northern Pulp?

Throughout its 50-year history critics of the Pictou mill have criticized successive governments for the generous support that they have given it. These investments and the criticisms arising from them are documented in Joan Baxter's book, *The Mill: Fifty Years of Pulp and Protest*.

Today, as the government and the mill consider the need to deal with the effluent that, for decades, has passed through Boat Harbour, criticism has reached a higher pitch than ever and it has embraced more than simply the monetary cost of replacing aging treatment facilities.

Considerable though those are, other costs may be even more significant. They include costs associated with making available to the mill some 400,000 cords of wood each year; the potential impact of releasing effluent into the Northumberland Strait and the costs to individuals and to the health care system of illnesses that many associate with pollution from the mill.

In this ongoing series of briefing notes we have already discussed the clearcutting that is providing the mill with its raw material, so we will not look at it again here.

Instead, the financial costs, health issues and the potential impact on the Northumberland Strait, have been hotly debated and we present here just a few of the many news reports of those debates here:

Proposals for discharging treated effluent into the Northumberland Strait have prompted the Premier of PEI to express concern to Premier McNeil:

<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/statement-premier-maclaughlan-proposed-northern-pulp-effluent-treatment-facility>

On both sides of the Strait the possible impact on their billion-dollar industry has alarmed fishermen. In an article published last December 8, Frances Campbell described the concerns of Mi'kmaq and fishermen:

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1527644-first-nation-fishermen-distrust-northern-pulp-treatment-plan>

As for the health issues associated with the mill, because records have either not been kept or not released, it has been difficult for critics to persuade skeptical policy makers that the Pictou area is any more likely than most urban regions to suffer from air pollution originating at the mill. Recently investigative reporter Linda Pannozzo published an article that goes some way to document the dangers of living near Northern Pulp.

(See https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/province-house/dirty-dealing-3/#Living_Downwind_Dangerous)

Pannozzo draws on a recent study by Dalhousie researchers which analysed ambient air quality emissions from the mill. The research found that 1,3-butadiene, benzene and carbon tetrachloride 'routinely exceeded' U.S. Environmental Protection Agency air toxics-associated cancer risk thresholds. Some were 'significantly higher' in certain weather conditions. (To access the report go to: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28712086>).

On February 27 Joan Baxter published a summary of current concerns about the debt Nova Scotians may have to assume in order to pay for 'remediation of Boat Harbour, pegged now at \$133 million.... A new

effluent system that early estimates put at \$100 million, and a \$70 million delignification system' plus the incidental costs that studies of each of these investments would probably incur. A total of at least \$300 million. Her article can be accessed at:

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/1549254-commentary-taxpayers-on-hook-forever-for-northern-pulp>

Her most recent article – 'Battle for the Mill' – appeared on March 21 in the *Halifax Examiner*, and can be accessed at:

https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/province-house/battle-for-the-mill/#_ednref5

You, our elected representatives, have to ask yourselves whether Nova Scotians should continue to support an aging facility that in its demand for wood places an undue burden on our forests and that imposes disproportionate financial demands on a province that is hard-pressed to pay for essential health, educational and social services.