

NOVA SCOTIA  
WATER RESOURCES COMMISSION  
P. O. BOX 2107  
HALIFAX, N. S.

August 31, 1970.



Reverend D. H. Ess,  
Minister of Sharon - St. John Church,  
P. O. Box 510,  
Stellarton, N. S.

Dear Sir:

Re: COUNTY OF PICTOU - BOAT HARBOUR WASTE TREATMENT FACILITIES - ADDRESS TO ROTARY CLUB

A copy of your letter of 16 August 1970 to Hon. G. I. Smith, Premier of Nova Scotia was sent to me for my comment.

As I understand the subject matter of your letter, you take exception to comments which I made while addressing the Rotary Club in Truro. I will confine my remarks in this context and, more specifically, to the remark about "emotional nonsense" and other items, which I assume were indicated by you in the copy of the newspaper article.

The waste treatment facilities at Boat Harbour are conventional settling pond - stabilization lagoon type which depend upon biological action to resolve or degrade organic waste material from a pulp mill. All processes for waste treatment for organic waste are based on these principles, at least most certainly for pulp mills. These processes in the absolute sense are clumsy, slow, expensive and subject to decreased efficiency in cold climates. In the relative sense, these same processes are the equivalent of the state of the art, in short, the best available at the present time.

In contemplating the design of such a facility, we were mindful of a number of considerations, such as, protection of the fishery in Northumberland Strait, ability to accept "shock" loads, opportunity for expansion, cost, and circumstances available. In such a problem, it is desirable to take advantage of circumstances to develop a facility. For example, such works have been constructed in form lands where a natural depression or terrain is suitable to create holding and treatment basins. In the case of Boat Harbour, a tidal lagoon seemed to offer the best opportunity for such a works and so the area was flooded to high tide and otherwise converted to the necessary ponds. This was done with the realization that certain properties in this area would be altered or, if you wish, destroyed. This is no different in principle from the destruction of the properties of farmland or forest in constructing highways, homes, towns and innumerable other manifestations of our way of life.

I personally regret that many of these things apparently must, in our society, be done this way.

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The Commission is concerned that the public be made aware of the difficulties and that "That these works at Boat Harbour perform usefully as intended can be demonstrated by the reports of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada." The latest report was in July of this year, and it indicates, together with some four other reports, that damage to the ecology in that area of Northumberland Strait off Boat Harbour cannot be demonstrated. I would digress to state that this organization is the most competent in that field that this country has produced.

The newspaper article to which you refer is, of course, only a portion of my remarks. This is probably necessary because of space. However, I think it must be appreciated that such an account cannot convey all the material, the tone, and other modifications of the entire address. I make this remark in the context of a comment about the deficiencies of communication rather than a criticism. When I refer to "emotional nonsense" I had in mind the production of a "show" by one of the TV media which, incidentally, I think could have been produced by photographing judiciously almost any swamp. I had in mind the remarks made from time to time by others reputed to be professionals about the destruction of the ecology of that area, in emotional tones with little or no effort to understand the purpose or results. These statements were made with no enquiry to us and no requests for reports or other data.

There exists mainly two problems at these facilities, odour and colour of the waters. I do not find the odour of the lagoon offensive, but I am not about to insist that someone else has not a contrary opinion. I think that the odour problem in that area is possibly due to the mill proper and in this event, it is a much more worthy endeavour to resolve this matter.

The colour in the waters is due to the presence of lignins and tannins from the wood. These materials result from the removal of cellulose, in the pulp manufacturing process, or from the decay of wood in the forest. These substances are relatively inert chemically and do not, therefore, decay. Because of the inertness chemically, these are not directly harmful. Except for concentration, these are the same substances which colour most of the streams in the Province. However, colour is aesthetically offensive and in this context, constitutes pollution. The Rust report describes the problems at Boat Harbour as mainly aesthetic.

The process to remove colour is, at present, undeveloped and very expensive. In view of the deficiency of money, I can think of many occasions of pollution where this sort of expenditure would accomplish much more than the removal of these lignins and tannins.

The members of the Water Resources Commission are concerned about pollution and pollution abatement. We are apprehensive of the costs and worried about solutions. We are dismayed to find a sector of the news media and some of the public taking such a delight in distorting situations seemingly to embarrass such an agency as if that group of the news media and that portion of the public were the protectors of the public against these official menaces.

August 28, 1970

The Commission is concerned that the public be aware of our activities and that we know the public's feelings, and within the limits of our resources, we have endeavoured to do this. In the case of Boat Harbour, I have, myself, attended at least three public meetings where, to the best of my knowledge, no question was left unanswered. Other communications have been maintained unless it is clear that these are simply instruments of harassment. I think it can, therefore, be stated reasonably that the public has had and will have an opportunity to learn the details of this sort of installation and, as well, the nature of the pollution abatement problem.

I might take this opportunity to add that, although we have by no means accomplished total pollution abatement, we have caused the construction of more than 300 treatment plants in the Province, the greater proportion during the past two and one half years. In that area of Pictou County, under our regulation, the chlor-alkali plant of Canso Chemicals has the most stringent pollution control measures of any plant of that type in the world and, at that, we believe that we are only causing the equivalent of the state of the art to be followed.

I trust that while the foregoing is lengthy, it will assure you that regard for the Public is manifest and that this agency is undertaking an honest job within the limits of our resources which I emphasize are mainly technology and money.

Yours truly,

*E. L. Rowe*  
E. L. Rowe, CHAIRMAN

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cc. Hon. D. R. MacLeod  
Mr. H. F. G. Stevens

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