

Intervenor Funding a Silver Lining?

Report of November 7, 2007, Meeting between the NBEN EA Caucus and the Minister of Environment, Roland Haché

By Raissa Marks

“Are you going to update the regulations?” This was the main burning question that the NBEN’s Environmental Assessment Reform Caucus had for Minister Haché at a recent meeting. The EA Caucus is concerned that the regulations governing environmental assessment are out of date – for example, they do not include any mention of large-scale agricultural operations or quarries – and that there is not enough structure built into the regulations, which leads to uncertainty and mistrust among environmental groups, government, and industry. Unfortunately, the Minister informed us that he was not considering revising or updating the regulations at this time. However, he did commit to sending a written response to the Caucus’s concerns.

The really exciting thing that happened during the meeting was that Minister Haché said he was open to the idea of providing intervenor funding to cover environmental groups’ expenses for travel, childcare, research, and other expenses for environmental assessment consultations and he agreed to consider a proposal on this matter. He made it clear, however, that there was no way the Department could ever provide enough funding to completely level the playing field with industry! Minister Haché suggested that this proposal should come from the NBEN and that it could come through the Environmental Trust Fund. The EA Caucus will be meeting shortly to decide whether to submit the proposal to the Environmental Trust Fund or directly to the Minister’s office, whether to submit a joint application between the NBEN and the New Brunswick Environmental Law Society or another group, and whether to suggest where the Department could find the cash to fund such a proposal (e.g., it could come from proponents as a percentage of the total cost of the project.).

Attendees on behalf of the EA Caucus included Neil Gardner, Sierra Club of/du Canada - Atlantic Canada Chapter; David Thompson, Conservation Council of New Brunswick Inc.; Louisa Barton-Duguay, SOS Eau Water Sankwan; Michel Desneiges, New Brunswick Environmental Law Society; and myself. Attendees from the Department included Minister Haché; Daniel Guitard, the Minister’s Executive Assistant; and Paul Vanderlaan, Director of Project Assessment and Approvals.