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The Honourable John Baird
Minister of the Environment for Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Mr. Baird:

I was extremely disappointed to learn of your decision not to conduct a Joint Panel Review of the proposed second Irving oil refinery project in Saint John, New Brunswick, in its entirety. This is a complete abdication of the Federal Government's responsibility for such matters as trans-boundary pollution, the protection of endangered species, and the protection of the marine environment in the unique eco-system of the Bay of Fundy. This proposed refinery is the first in North America in a generation, may be the largest industrial project ever undertaken in New Brunswick, and as such has the potential for serious and widespread effects on the environment.

Should this second oil refinery be built, it is expected to produce some three million tons of CO2 a year, as well as other harmful pollutants, which will likely have effects on adjoining jurisdictions, such as Maine and Nova Scotia, not to mention contributing to the world-wide problem of global warming. As well, there would be a huge increase in ship traffic in the Bay of Fundy, approximately doubling the tanker traffic associated with the present refinery, as supertankers bring crude to the refineries, and other ships carry away finished products (gasoline, diesel, heating oil) to their U.S. destinations. There would also be produced large quantities of dirty petroleum coke, which would have to be disposed of in some manner.

While the shipping lanes have been moved to avoid the areas of greatest concentration of the North Atlantic Right Whale, the increase in ship traffic I describe, along with 80 to 100 huge LNG tankers per year soon to be serving the new LNG plant in Saint John, may more than offset any reductions in ship strikes – the greatest threat to the survival of this species – that revised shipping lanes may avert.

Along with inevitable smaller releases of oil and other contaminants, increased ship traffic means increased probability for ship collisions or groundings, hence increased probability for large and catastrophic oil spills. A spill of this type would be disastrous in the Bay of Fundy, with its strong tides and currents, exacerbated further by increased numbers of hurricanes, tropical storm, and other weather events that climate changes may be expected to bring to the Bay of Fundy.

I am convinced that it is simply beyond the capabilities of the provincial government here to evaluate, or to provide contingencies for, these matters. As examples, the Coast Guard (a **federal** agency) is responsible for oil spills; Environment Canada (**your** department) is responsible for issuing weather forecasts, and this system may require upgrades to ensure accurate and timely information to this increased ship traffic to prevent accidents; Transport Canada (another **federal** agency) handles ship traffic control. All of these matters are completely out of the control of the province; yet, except for a small area around the wharf, you propose to leave environmental impact assessment up to the province? This decision defies explanation or justification.

Further, as you must be aware, Premier Graham stated at the outset that he favours a second oil refinery in Saint John, and Irving Oil has stated that the company prefers a provincial environmental assessment. I believe that this speaks volumes about the relationship between the Irving corporations and the government of New Brunswick. A provincial review will allow for little meaningful input by members of the public, with no public funding available to them for research.

It is timely, Mr. Baird, that you review the recent Red Chris Mine decision, in which Mr. Justice Martineau said that DFO's re-scoping of the project from a Comprehensive Study to a screening in December 2004, "has all the characteristics of a capricious and arbitrary decision which was taken for an improper purpose." The people of New Brunswick will not sit idly by and be ignored by a perceived government-corporate agenda, when a proposal of this magnitude demands nothing less than a Full Federal Panel Review, allowing for full public participation, to assess the potentially disastrous effects to the environment.

Yours truly,

Dr. Leland Thomas, Chairperson
Green Party of Canada, Saint John EDA