

June 24, 1996

For immediate release

Loss of Environmental Safety Net Feared

New Brunswick's environmental safety net is in danger of being cut - that is the reaction of 33 New Brunswick environmental groups to the May communiqué from the Canadian Council of the Ministers of the Environment (CCME). The CCME vision was confirmed at the First Ministers Conference on Friday, June 21 in Ottawa. The Federal government is on the verge of giving away its environmental enforcement, environmental assessment, and standard setting responsibilities to the Provinces.

A recent report of the New Brunswick Environmental Network Harmonization Working Group states that the "New Brunswick Department of Environment cannot be trusted to take on the responsibility to enforce federal environmental laws since it often fails to enforce its own environmental laws." Statistics from the NB Department of the Environment itself show decreases in fines (25%), prosecutions (53%) and clean up orders (90%) between the years 1993 and 1995.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has already delegated fish habitat protection to the provinces. "In our case, this will place fish habitat protection into the hands of a provincial government that is ready to put a highway through one of its most important wetland areas," says Ms. Abouchar, Vice President, Policy of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick.

If the Federal government gives up its role in standard setting, provinces with lower environmental standards like New Brunswick are in danger of becoming pollution havens in Canada. New Brunswick pulp mills are currently regulated by standards that are less strict than mills in Ontario and BC.

The agreement that is presently being negotiated will encourage the development of such pollution havens. Under the agreement, provinces that want to have higher environmental standards will need the approval of the federal government and every other province. Provinces that want to drop their standards will be free to do so at will.

Finally, the move in other jurisdictions to recognize that citizens have a right to clean air, and water and a healthy environment has not been adopted in New Brunswick. "If the federal government's enforcement presence is removed, who will watch the province?" asks Beth McLaughlin of People Against Nuclear Energy. Without legal rights to enforce environmental laws, citizens have no recourse of their own. "It is like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse," adds Ms. McLaughlin.

In a 1994 Poll by Ekos Research, the general public placed a clean environment second after freedom as a goal for the federal government. A strong federal role in the environment is seen by Canadians to be indispensable.

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Groups that have endorsed this press release include:

Atlantic Salmon Federation

Blue-Green Society

Canadian Environmental Defence Fund

Citizens Coalition for Clean Air

Clearinghouse Group

Comité de l'environnement de Mathieu-Martin

Comité pour la sauvegarde des îles

Conservation Council of New Brunswick

Coopérative O Naturel

Earth Concerns of St. Paul's United

EcoAction

Ecoversité

Falls Brook Centre

Ford Alward Naturalist Association

Friends of the Christmas Mountains

Fundy Environmental Action Group

Grand Lake Action Committee

Grand Manan Whale and Seabird Research Station

Irishtown Nature Park

Jeunes étudiant.e.s pour l'environnement de l'univers

New Brunswick Farm Women's Organization

New Brunswick Federation of Naturalists

New Brunswick Veterans Against Nuclear Arms

New Brunswick Voice of Women for Peace

People Against Lepreau 2

People Against Nuclear Energy

River Road Action Team

Save Our Shores

Sustainable Agriculture for the Valley Ecosystem

The Kindness Club / Le cercle Saint-François

Trees International Blue-Green Society

Washademoak Environmentalists

West Isles Clean Environment Committee, Inc.