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February 7, 2025
Premier Tim Houston
PO Box 726, Halifax NS B3J 2T3
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Intention to Expand Unsustainable Natural Resource Industries and Dismissal of Expert Opinion, or “Trading the Province for Profits”

Dear Premier Houston,

On January 21st, you sent a letter to your caucus addressing potential actions your government could take in response to US President Trump's threat of tariffs, later made available as an advertisement intended to serve as an open letter to the public in the Chronicle Herald. We are extremely concerned with some of the content of your letter, the follow-up information provided in news conferences and statements, as well as the disrespectful way you have described the interests of Nova Scotians and the environmental groups that represent them, referring to opposition voices to unsustainable resource extraction activities as “special interest” groups.

Your letter first addresses the importance of fishing, farming, and forestry to the Nova Scotian economy and seems to imply that each deserves more support given the dangers posed by extremist policies in the United States. On this topic we agree. Forestry in Nova Scotia is long overdue for an overhaul and Nova Scotians deserve a future with healthy hardwood forests, expanded value-added forest products, and greater supports for small, locally owned, and family-run businesses, all of which are compatible with a just transition to ecological forestry. Commercial fisheries in Nova Scotia are threatened by poorly planned open-net pen licenses. It is nearly impossible for young progressive Nova Scotians to get into farming today, sustainable or not, plagued with high debts and disproportionately burdened by uncontrolled high rents. May we take your statements here to mean that you are about to reveal new efforts addressing these issues? If that is the case then we thank you for your forward-thinking approach to both social justice and a sustainable natural resource based economy.

However, your letter continues to describe “green” hydrogen, wind, and lithium mining as untapped opportunities. On January 22nd, you held a news conference where you discussed this letter at length and listed additional activities your government would like to explore including uranium mining, fracking for natural gas, and the moratorium on oil and gas exploration on the lucrative fishing grounds of Georges Bank.

There is great potential for the development of wind energy in Nova Scotia. On land, however, many of the best areas for wind farm development overlap with critical habitat for the mainland moose, among other important species, a conflict which, so far, your government has provided us with no strategy or comment on. Mining in general is poorly regulated in Canada and Nova Scotia has a disastrous history with leaks, abandoned developments, ethical and logistical issues with self-monitoring allowances, and few economic returns. Both fracking and oil and gas development on Georges Bank have already been discussed at length in Nova Scotia, including by Conservative governments, and Nova Scotians have already decided that the risks are too high and benefits too few. The Assembly of Mi'kmaq Chiefs, in particular, advocated strongly for the moratorium on fracking. We recommend you re-read the Nova Scotia Independent Panel on Hydraulic Fracturing report, Ecology Action Centre's The Impacts of Fracking in Nova Scotia, and explore newer papers like the Scientific Review of Hydraulic Fracturing in British Columbia, if you aren't convinced yourself.

Unless your letter means to suggest that all of these experts are lying... which brings us to our second concern.

On January 27th, you provided clarification that your government would not, actually, explore opportunities for

exploiting Georges Bank and blamed what you called the “misunderstanding”, again, on “special interest” groups “spreading falsehoods”. When pressed to name these elusive sleeper cell special interest groups, your office issued a cryptic statement mentioning an interview given by Ecology Action Centre, which was critical of your intention to expand these unsustainable activities. You did, in fact, state to reporters during your news conference that you were open to exploring oil and gas opportunities on Georges Bank. It seems that you were approached shortly after your statements by other “special interest” groups, fishing associations, who were understandably concerned about your disregard for one of our country’s most important marine resources, but you did not name them as such.

So you see, we are left wondering if your term “special interest” group refers only to organizations based in Halifax, or urban areas in general, or perhaps only to organizations led by scientists and other experts in environmental fields. In this case, where does Nature Nova Scotia fall? Our staff and board are rural Nova Scotians, some of us woodlot owners, and foresters, but we are also scientists, and we are certainly environmentalists. Will you dismiss our concerns as thoughtlessly as you have those of Ecology Action Centre? What about the Mi’kmaq, who weren’t mentioned at all in your letter or following statements. Are the first peoples of this land, who you have a legal duty to consult, also “special interest” groups? What about the Nova Scotians who voted to put your government in power, who had no notice that you intended to re-open these topics because they were not mentioned in your party’s platforms?

Over the last few years, your government has reversed protections for Wetlands of Special Significance, halted all progress on the Coastal Protection Act that Nova Scotians across political leanings asked for, and have yet to foster meaningful transition towards ecological forestry as outlined by the actions in the Lahey Report. Now you rush full-speed-ahead towards dangerous natural resource industries Nova Scotians have already said they don’t want and dismiss expert opinion as conspiracy.

These are uncertain times. Nova Scotians deserve careful, measured action to buffer the threat of extremist and reactionary policies that may become more commonplace in other jurisdictions and threaten both our natural capital and economy. The disregard for expert opinion, lack of transparency, and apparent willingness to sell Nova Scotia for low gains and high environmental costs demonstrated in your letter and subsequent statements offer little reassurance to us that your government is acting in the public’s (or nature’s) best interest with this proposed new direction.

Forty years ago, the crest on Nova Scotia conservation officer’s jackets read “Conserve Our Resources”. “Our” as in belonging to the people. Please don’t forget whose side you are on. Our intact environment is the pillar on which all natural resource industries precariously sit. Nova Scotia is not for sale.

Respectfully, Premier, give y’er head a shake...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Bancroft".

Bob Bancroft
President, Nature Nova Scotia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Becky Parker".

Becky Parker
Executive Director, Nature Nova Scotia

Member organizations (representing more than 10,000 Nova Scotians):

Annapolis Royal & Area Environment and Ecology Group • Annapolis Waterkeepers • Arlington Forest Protection Society • Blomidon Naturalists Society • Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark • Eastern Shore Forest Watch • Friends of Antigonish Harbour • Friends of Blue Mountain–Birch Cove Lakes Society • Friends of McNabs Island Society • Friends of Nature • Friends of the Pugwash Estuary • Halifax Field Naturalists • Healthy Bays Network • Hope for Wildlife • International Crane Foundation • Margaree Environmental Association • Nova Scotia Bird Society • Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society • Protect Wentworth Valley • Save Caribou • Save Our Old Forests • St. Margaret’s Bay Stewardship Association • Stop Clearcutting Unama’ki • Stop Spraying & Clear-Cutting Nova Scotia • The Dirt Gang • Tusket River Environmental Protection Society • Young Naturalists Club of Nova Scotia