



## **Friends of the Northumberland Strait Statement on Settlement Agreement between Northern Pulp and Province of Nova Scotia**

Friends of the Northumberland Strait (FONS) is delighted that Northern Pulp will no longer be pursuing plans to discharge 45 million litres of treated pulp effluent daily into Pictou Harbour or anywhere else in the Northumberland Strait as part of the Settlement Agreement reached between the company and the provincial government announced on May 23, 2024.

Almost 6 years ago, 3500 people gathered at a Land and Sea Rally on the Pictou Waterfront with two clear messages: No Pipe in the Strait, and Honour the Act: Close Boat Harbour to Effluent on schedule. It's been a long road with many twists and turns, but both goals have now been met.

Premier Stephen McNeil met the crucial demand to close Boat Harbour for pulp effluent treatment in early 2020. Now, more than 4 years later, residents of Pictou County and fishermen in the Northumberland Strait are finally free from the threat of Northern Pulp's effluent in local waters and toxic air pollution.

FONS and others believed from the start that Northern Pulp's proposal would result in significant harm to the environment and people's lives. Together with a wide range of experts, including marine biologists and geologists, chemists, engineers, fishermen, both commercial and recreational, everyday concerned citizens and organizations representing diverse sectors throughout the Maritimes, we were able to demonstrate the flaws in Northern Pulp's plans.

Two rounds of environmental assessment drew responses from over 1000 people. Many pointed out errors, misinformation or critical gaps in Northern Pulp's documentation. Others detailed the negative impacts that Northern Pulp's proposal could have on their livelihoods or their quality of life. Twice, the Minister of the Environment ruled that Northern Pulp had not proven that their proposal would not have significant environmental effects that could not be mitigated. Twice, the company was required to provide additional information. That final required report never came, and Northern Pulp never revealed the composition of the effluent they planned to release into the Strait.

We have reached this point because of the efforts of many people over many years. For decades, concerned citizens in Pictou County and Pictou Landing First Nation worked to alert government and the public to the mill's harmful impacts on their lives and tried to have problems resolved.

When Northern Pulp introduced their proposed new effluent treatment plan in 2017, a broad coalition of people came together to point out the risks of the company's proposal. The Fishermen's Working Group, representing 3000 fishermen from 3 provinces, Pictou Landing First Nation, and the Town of Pictou were key stakeholders throughout the process. The Government of PEI weighed in, concerned about the fishery. FONS is especially grateful for the assistance of lawyers from Ecojustice, Canada's largest environmental law charity, who helped us intervene effectively in the EA process with hard hitting, fact-based submissions.

FONS is relieved that this chapter of Pictou County history is over. It is long past time to end the pulp mill's polluting practices that compromised people's health and quality of life for

over 50 years. There are still loose ends. FONS will be watching for remediation of the Mill Site and adjacent Canso Chemicals where there is documented mercury contamination. There are outstanding issues to be resolved between Pictou Landing First Nation and Northern Pulp.

The years since Northern Pulp's closure have seen positive changes in Pictou County.

There are lessons to be learned so that history is not repeated. Nova Scotia needs effective environmental laws, regulation and enforcement to prevent problems and to ensure that when problems do arise, they are resolved in a timely way. Penalties need to be a real deterrent, not an easily absorbed "cost of doing business." And if ever there is a lesson written in bold, it is that indemnity agreements and broad commitments of support can result in costly, unexpected long-term consequences for local communities and the province as a whole.

**Jill Graham-Scanlan, President**

**Friends of the Northumberland Strait**

**May 24, 2014**