

Environment tops public forum issues

By Neil Horner - Parksville Qualicum Beach News - November 13, 2007

Dock chunks and Hamilton Marsh top concerns

When Nanaimo-Alberni MP James Lunney held a special public forum in Parksville Thursday night, he covered a wide spectrum of issues, from local initiatives to the overall federal picture.

What captured the agenda for the approximately 30 people in attendance at the Parksville Civic and Technology Centre however were two local environmental issues.

In a question and answer session after Lunney's speech, Parksville resident John Nickson called on the MP to take some action to help get the chunks of broken dock cleaned up from Nanoose Bay.

"Remnants of the First Nations dock cover the shore of the bay," he said. "Nobody has taken responsibility There are over 170 pieces of debris, from iron posts to styrofoam."

In response, Lunney called the situation disappointing, noting the issue appears to fall between jurisdictions.

"The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is not concerned if it does not harm habitat and the Ministry of Environment is not concerned if they aren't leaking pollutants," he said. "We need to deal with this at all levels of government."

Lunney noted he plans to bring up the issue with a caucus of coastal parliamentarians, in order to help kickstart such multi-government cooperation

"It's an important issue," he said. "However, the province doesn't have the mandate and the municipalities don't have the authority."

Lunney noted there are similar problems up and down the coast, with communities such as Ladysmith struggling with abandoned boats.

However, Nickson stressed the scope of the Nanoose Bay situation is unique and he pressed Lunney to take a more active role in resolving the issue.

Following on Nickson's heels, Friends of French Creek president Robin Robinson called on the MP to take a role in the ongoing effort to save the Hamilton Marsh wetland near Qualicum Beach.

"We really need you to help us push this and try to find a way to make this happen," she said of the drive to purchase the Hamilton Marsh property from its owners, Island Timberlands. "We need to save it all."

In response, Lunney agreed the marshland is a sensitive habitat which is unique in the region.

"The situation is, we have money available to purchase wetlands, but we need a willing seller, and Island Timberlands don't want to deal with it," he said. "The reality is they are the owner and there is such a thing as property rights."

However, Lunney said the future of the wetland is still very much up in the air and he stressed saving it is still possible.

"They haven't given a final no," he said.

"They say they are reviewing their assets. The process will continue and we will do everything we can to make sure it is protected."

Other topics brought up at the meeting included youth crime and drugs, where Lunney stressed the government's commitment to cracking down on violent offenders and drug dealers.

As well, questions were raised from the audience about former prime minister Brian Mulroney and his troubles with the AirBus scandal.

news@pqbnews.com