

Manitoba Wildlands

2011 Provincial Election Questionnaire #2 – Licensing & Environment Act

Thank you for your correspondence regarding Manitoba's Environment Act and our licensing process.

All Manitobans agree that protecting our environment is an important goal. As you may know, Manitoba undertook the most comprehensive strengthening of our Environment Act in decades beginning in 2009. These amendments were primarily aimed at creating a more comprehensive and stringent environmental protection regime.

Key provisions of amendments:

- Enhance pollution protection by creating a strengthened prohibition against the unauthorized release of pollutants that have a significant negative impact on the environment.
- Provide stronger environmental protection by expanding the enforcement powers of environment officers, allowing them to inspect and to intervene earlier and more effectively in situations posing a serious threat to the environment, rather than only responding to emergency situations.
- Improve the licensing process, including by requiring that greenhouse-gas emissions from a proposed project be considered before a licence is issued.

Among the amendments was a requirement that approved minor licence alterations be posted in the public registry. This step is aimed at improving transparency and accountability in the licensing process.

We have supplemented these new expanded powers by hiring new environment officers and by launching a new enhanced inspection regime which for the first-time in the province's history is pro-actively inspecting septic systems in sensitive areas such as the Red River corridor. Where problems are found, officers are taking the necessary actions to protect our water. It's unfortunate that the PCs voted against these increased investments. It is worth noting that in 2006 when we amended the Water Rights Act to give water resource officers new inspection powers, the PCs said it was "not necessary" and accused us of creating "water police."

The changes also build on amendments to the Environment Act we introduced in 2001, which provided an opportunity for earlier public input into proposals that fall under the act, provided proponents the opportunity to involve the government and public at the design stage of a proposal, and expanded the role of the Clean Environment Commission to allow it to hold information meetings and undertake mediation and negotiations, as well as holding public hearings.

We have been glad to work closely with the Clean Environment Commission, under the *Environment Act*, which we believe provides invaluable advice to government on potentially contentious matters. For example, in recent years we have received strong advice from the Commission on matters ranging from the sustainability of the hog industry, to Winnipeg's wastewater treatment system, to Louisiana Pacific's

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oriented strand board plant air emissions. Most recently, we introduced and passed legislation during this past session aimed at improving the Technical Review Committee (TRC) process for livestock operations, as had been recommended by the CEC. These amendments will enable the government to create a more comprehensive, transparent and inclusive process for the TRC when reviewing applications for new or expanded livestock operations involving 300 or more animal units.

We take the CEC's advice very seriously and we are proud to follow their advice. In contrast, under Hugh McFadyen's watch, Gary Filmon's PCs ignored a 1992 Clean Environment Commission recommendation and allowed logging in Nopiming park. We are very proud to have passed legislation to take commercial logging out of all but one Manitoba provincial park.

We look forward to further improvements to Manitoba's environmental protection regime. We will continue to support open and transparent access to information, subject to legitimate legislative constraints.