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CONSERVATIVES ALLOW MINE WASTE TO DESTROY LAKES: NDP

OTTAWA –NDP Fisheries and Oceans critic Peter Stoffer (Sackville-Eastern Shore) called on Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn today to stop allowing mining companies to discharge their toxic mine tailings into healthy lakes.

“The Conservatives must stop allowing healthy lakes to be used as dumping grounds for mining waste,” said Stoffer. “DFO and Environment Canada are set to allow the destruction of two more healthy fish-bearing water bodies in Nunavut (Second Portage Lake and Tail Lake) by allowing mining companies to discharge their tailings into these lakes.

“I call on Minister Hearn to halt this practice now,” said Stoffer. “Furthermore, I ask him to review why the mining industry gets special permission to use healthy fish bearing lakes as waste disposal options. All mining operations should be required to have separate contained tailing ponds that do not destroy healthy aquatic or freshwater ecosystems.”

The healthy lakes may be destined for destruction if they are placed on Schedule 2 of the Metal Mining Effluent Regulations (MMERs), under the Fisheries Act, which re-defines lakes as mine waste impoundments. If a regulatory amendment is approved, the two Nunavut lakes will join two trout and salmon-bearing lakes in Newfoundland and Labrador that are currently being destroyed by mine waste following a similar amendment of the regulations in 2006.

“It is completely unacceptable that Canada’s precious freshwater habitats are being turned over to the mining industry as cheap waste disposal solutions” said Catherine Coumans of Mining Watch Canada, “and it is an insult that Canadians’ opportunities to provide meaningful input into these decisions are being purposefully limited.”

Following a directive from DFO, Environment Canada is planning a brief “information session” in January after which the department will propose a regulatory amendment to the Fisheries Act. Most of these projects are being scoped by DFO for screening-level Environmental Assessments, which limit public participation.

“I am afraid that many more healthy lakes will be sacrificed across the country if this practice is allowed to continue,” said Stoffer. “This entire practice is shameful and goes against the very spirit of the Fisheries Act which prohibits the deposit of deleterious (toxic or harmful) substances into fish-frequented waters.”

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