

February 13, 2025

Dear Marco,

I don't know if you will remember me. We have had a couple of chats, at Caribou wharf on setting day, at a chicken BBQ in River John, and at HarvFest in Pictou where I was selling mittens and we talked about energy and your new committee roles.

I am writing to you because I am deeply concerned about the Premier's letter to caucus of January 21, 2025, stating "Outright bans of entire sectors are lazy public policy and **we will reverse bans** and focus on meaningful, mature discussion." The Premier has repeated this intention to reverse bans to media and again at the PC's recent AGM, blaming a small minority of citizens for "outsized policy impacts" with which he disagrees.

I would like to give you some background on Nova Scotia's ban on fracking for shale gas. In 2013, during the last week of the provincial election, a [poll conducted by Abacus Data](#) found that 69% of Nova Scotians strongly supported or supported a continued moratorium on fracking, "unless an independent review finds there is no risk to drinking water, human health, the climate or communities." Support was consistently high across the province and across all four political parties. Only 16% opposed a continued moratorium.

The Independent Review Panel Hydraulic Fracturing (aka the Wheeler Commission) was established by the government in August 2013 and included experts from diverse fields, including industry. After study of the existing science as well as information specific to Nova Scotia, e.g. our geology, as well as hearing public input, the Panel submitted its [report](#) to the government in 2014. "We advocate a precautionary approach," the Report stated. The Report set out several "top level" recommendations including:

- Hydraulic fracturing for the purpose of unconventional gas and oil development should not proceed at the present time in Nova Scotia.
- Independently conducted research of a scientific and public participatory nature is required to model economic, social, environmental, and community health impacts of all forms of energy production and use - including any prospect of unconventional gas and oil development in Nova Scotia - at both provincial and community levels.
- Nova Scotia should design and recognize the test of a community permission to proceed before exploration occurs for the purpose of using hydraulic fracturing in the development of unconventional gas and oil resources.

Nova Scotia's present legislation banning hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in shale (Bill 6) was introduced after the government of the day received the report of the Wheeler Commission. Far from being cowardly or lazy public policy, as the Premier claims, I think most people would consider this an example of meaningful, mature, **evidence-based** discussion leading to responsible legislative action.

You may be under the impression that the risks identified with fracking in 2014 have been resolved in the ten years since Bill 6 became law. A look at scientific literature shows the opposite. In fact, the negative impacts or risks of fracking in shale on human health, on climate,

and on the environment continue to be confirmed. In a number of areas, harm has been shown to be even greater than previously thought.

Recent Canadian studies show methane leakage (with its outsized climate impact) and risks of groundwater contamination from abandoned wells are higher than earlier estimated. Alberta has 370,000 abandoned wells, both conventional and unconventional. [A 2024 study](#) published by the American Chemical Society found "Leakage of fluids from oil and gas wells is a source of the key greenhouse gas methane, and presents environmental risks, including groundwater contamination." A [2023 study](#) of well casing leakage from abandoned wells in Alberta and Saskatchewan concludes, "... well integrity failures and groundwater contamination are likely to be more common than previous studies suggest." The authors note, "Studies measuring actual emissions from methane leaks from abandoned wells in Canada found methane leakage was higher than previously reported, and, despite regulations, many instances remained unreported."

While the connection between earthquakes and fracking in shale was uncertain 10 years ago, it is now well documented, including in areas where earthquakes did not previously occur.

Human health impacts from fracking are now well documented through multiple studies. In October 2024, the President and CEO of NB Lung and the President of Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment published a [joint opinion piece](#) in the Brunswick News. Based on up-to-date information on the links between fracking and health, they called on the New Brunswick government to legislate a permanent ban on fracking.

The opinion piece reads in part, "[In a letter sent to New Brunswick's premier last May](#), we and three other experts outlined the **links between fracking and adverse health conditions including asthma, childhood leukemia, premature births, heart failure, and much more...** Some studies also suggest the extraction processes involved in fracking can worsen radon gas exposure, the second-leading cause of lung cancer in Canada. ... The costs to B.C.'s health-care system from fracking are significant. So too would the costs be to New Brunswick's already stretched system if fracking were to go ahead."

This is a tiny sample of current scientific information pointing to the wisdom of continuing Nova Scotia's ban on hydraulic fracturing in shale. Given evidence from other provinces, there is no reason to believe that even made-in-Canada regulations can solve the problems.

Premier Houston states that one of the core PC and Nova Scotian values is to **"Be a good steward – strive to pass on a natural environment to future generations that is the same or better than the one we inherited."**

I strongly support this goal. I believe that evidence shows that continuing the ban on fracking in shale is consistent with this goal. I hope that you will do what you can to point out to the Premier that meaningful, mature, and evidence-based discussions were the foundation for the present moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in shale, and that such discussion, including thorough evidence-based evaluation of all risks and benefits, both short and longer term, **should come before any action to reverse a ban or moratorium.**

I hope you will raise with the Premier the risks of characterizing such bans as mere red tape, and attacking citizens, both expert and community based, who advocate caution to protect our health and our environment. These actions are not consistent with a path leading to the above goal.

The Independent Panel Report on Fracking noted:

"We strongly suggest that whatever time is needed for each of these steps that it should be taken, without any sense of deadline-setting or impatience by any actor." (*Executive Summary*)

I believe this remains good, non-partisan advice today.

I would be happy to provide additional information, and/or meet with you to discuss issues related to fracking if that would be useful to you.

In the spirit of working together for a truly sustainable Nova Scotia,

Barb Harris
River John