



Law Amendments Committee:

STATEMENT from Mike Lancaster on behalf of the Healthy Forest Coalition

On behalf of the Healthy Forest Coalition, we are grateful for the opportunity to appear before the Law Amendments Committee this morning. We are pleased to see the government introduce the original Biodiversity Act - Bill 4, an Act that aimed to protect and enshrine the protection of all Nova Scotian biodiversity into legislation. Biodiversity health is not a function of some exterior portion of our world, it IS our world and thus it is also the health of our economies as well as our own. This means that biodiversity health must not simply be a goal to work towards but a mandate that is woven into the very fibre of all of our legislation and society.

We were tremendously disappointed to learn of the intended removal of the application of the Bill to private land; Offences and Emergency Orders. The fact that this effort largely came as a result of pressure from a publicly-funded, industrial lobby group, coupled with our inability to read these changes prior to this presentation, has created an anti-democratic process. This should be a concern to all Nova Scotians.

Through our combined countless decades of experience and research on topics of sustainable forestry, forest ecology, and biology we make the following specific recommendations:

1. The initial State of Biodiversity Report should be completed as soon as possible. We believe that a two year period for this initiative is reasonable and that five years, with many of our Species at Risk in precipitous decline, is too long to wait. This Act requires a strong baseline of comparison and therefore one must be established as soon as possible. After the establishment of the initial State of Biodiversity Report we believe that five years for subsequent Reports is appropriate. For example, the preamble touches on Mi'kmaq values and concepts which we believe should be moved to the purpose section.
2. The changing of the section 7 from "The Minister may.." to "The Minister shall"

3. Section 13(2) - The Minister shall begin reporting to the public on the state of the Province's biodiversity within three years of this Act coming into force and shall give regular updates no later than every five years thereafter. - In order to work to keep up with the ongoing collapse of biodiversity, the initial 'state of biodiversity' must be completed within a shorter timeframe and have the updates completed every three years thereafter.
4. As they are a crucial component to ecosystem function and biodiversity health, the Act should cover aquatic ecosystems, not just terrestrial. Many of our most harmful invasive species are aquatic-based organisms.

Our biodiversity is in decline, this is not in question but a settled matter. We are adding more and more species to the list of Species at Risk and dozens, perhaps hundreds, of others of conservation concern, in the queue to be formally protected. This legislation will help to reduce the threat to these species and ecosystems as well as human prosperity. However, now that private land application has been removed from the Bill, these efforts only have the potential to make substantial contributions to 30% of Nova Scotia's biodiversity.

All Nova Scotians benefit from a healthy biodiversity, both directly and indirectly, so all of our Members of the Legislative Assembly must ask themselves: "What legacy do we want to leave? Do we want to be bold, enacting changes that secure a prosperous future for successive generations, or do we want to continue the status quo?"