

Letter from Farley Mowat to the Public Review into Oil and Gas Exploration in Cape Breton

(to be hand delivered and read on my behalf)

January 23, 2001

Dr. Teresa McNeil
Commissioner,
Public Review into Oil and
Gas Exploration in Cape Breton
Wagmatcook Cultural Centre
Nyanza ,
Cape Breton,
Nova Scotia

Dear Dr. McNeil,

I write as a Cape Breton resident (the better part of every year over the last three decades) and as a chronicler of the abuse our kind has been visiting on Planet Earth. Apparently, Neal Livingston suggested that Sea of Slaughter form part of the research materials available to you as you consider the implications of allowing oil and gas companies to enter the fragile ecosystems of the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and Sydney Bight. I am grateful that this has been done.

What I hope to bring to your deliberations is a note of urgency. The areas under review, so ingloriously now described as license areas #2364, 2365, and 2368, contain but pathetic remnants of the life that once abounded in our region. We human beings have wiped out a vast number of species, driving them to extinction or extirpation. The walrus, the great auk, the Eskimo curlew, and the polar bear are no longer to be found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The remaining species, described by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in its submission in terms such as "high biomass... highly productive... and diverse," are in reality decimated. We know the Atlantic cod, Leather back turtle, Right Whale and Atlantic salmon are clinging to existence. The other species, providing the lifeblood of the communities that dot the coastline, are doing relatively well -- but "relative" only to modern day comparisons.

The urgency is this: your decision will be the last chance to preserve the life of the sea in this corner of the world. The rest of the world is faring no better. Human assault on the life of the Earth is in high gear. As a species, we take no prisoners.

Declaring that the nursery, spawning, migratory and feeding areas -- indeed the entire in-shore and coastal cradle of life along the coast of Cape Breton --- is off-limits to the rapacious greed of Big Oil will not, of itself, guarantee the survival of the ecosystem. The commitment of fishermen to conservation, the engagement of countless volunteers and eco-activists will do the rest. But, Dr.McNeil, your recommendation is the sine qua non.

I regret that I am unable to attend in person to add my voice to those of others in the Save our Seas and Shores Coalition. Take this passionate plea as if offered to you in the song of the whale, the cry of the screaming gull. These creatures have no voice in a Public Review, but it is their welfare, after these centuries of biocidal butchery, that must guide our decisions if we are to have a livable world for them or for ourselves.

Best Wishes

(Original signed by hand)

Farley Mowat