
Environment minister not doing her job – Jones

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The failure of Environment Minister Charlene Johnson to be proactive and advocate for improvements to oil spill response and infrastructure in Placentia Bay is another example of a minister who is not doing her job.

That’s the opinion of Opposition leader Yvonne Jones, after she raised the issue in the Legislature Tuesday.

Mrs. Jones indicated Placentia Bay has been identified as the most likely place in Canada for an oil spill to take place, due to the high traffic of oil tankers and industrial activity. She said an oil spill risk assessment completed by Transport Canada estimated a spill in the range of 10,000 barrels will likely occur within the next 30 years in this region of the province.

“ While the impacts of any such spill would be devastating to the local environment and economy, Environment Minister Johnson continues to state it doesn’t fall within her jurisdiction.”

The Liberal leader noted the 2003 PC Blue-book stated the ‘ Williams government will develop a comprehensive environmental protection strategy for Placentia Bay’, but nothing has been presented.

“ There continues to be no concrete emergency action plan developed for Placentia Bay in the event of a spill and our provincial minister of the environment seems to have very little interest in working closely with the federal government to make this issue a priority.

“ If this minister was doing her job, she would be monitoring every aspect related to a potential spill in Placentia Bay. Under questioning, she (Mrs . Johnson) stated that it would only become her responsibility once oil hits land. I would tell the minister that she

should be addressing the gaps that exist today, not after a spill takes place.”

Mrs. Jones indicated fishermen have stated a spill in Placentia Bay could destroy their livelihoods; environmentalists have stated a spill of any magnitude could wipe out the seabird population at Cape St. Mary’s, and everyone knows the impact oil has on land once it reaches shore.

“ Concerns have also been raised about the lack of safeguards and early response measures for potential oil spills and whether there are sufficient human resources and capital infrastructure to detect and immediately clean-up a large scale spill. If the minister doesn’t feel these issues fall within the mandate of her department, she should reevaluate the role and function of her office.”

The leader admitted the federal government is ultimately responsible for offshore spills, the provincial minister should be providing input on every committee and continuously making recommendations on how to provide greater resources and guidelines to prevent oil spills.