

Jones files request on emergency limestone

Wants details on cost, quality of shipments

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TRANSCONTINENTAL MEDIA—DEER LAKE

Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones has filed a freedom of information request with the province to ascertain how much money the government spent on emergency shipments of agricultural limestone following the suspended operations of Island Aggregates and Ready Mix Inc. in May.

At the time, the company was the only supplier of quality agricultural limestone in the province.

According to representatives from the Department of Natural Resources, the emergency shipments were from New Brunswick and began only after it was determined that no other provincial supplier besides Island Aggregates would be able to immediately provide limestone to local farmers.

The emergency shipments were stopped as of June 25 when a standing offer was reached between the province and a suitable, alternate local supplier.

"Once the standing offer was reached," according to a department spokesperson, "there were no more orders placed outside the province."

Shipping is the most significant cost associated with limestone. The provincial government has traditionally covered the cost of trucking limestone shipments to farmers with roughly 150 loads (4,500 tonnes) of agricultural limestone delivered to farmers for use between May and November of each year.

Although the off-island shipments have ended, Jones is still concerned about how much has been paid for the limestone and how the government has dealt with Island Aggregates. "We thought the government's handling of this situation was very poor," Jones said Tuesday.

Jones has previously criticized the handling of the Island

Aggregates case in The Western Star. Her focus has been on the lack of communication between the government and the company, which she said never told the government that it was unable to continue with its limestone operations.

"The concern for me is never did they contact government and say they could not fulfil the contract offer for limestone," Jones said.

Representatives of the department met with company representatives on May 23.

According to a June 20 letter to the editor of The Western Star from Natural Resources Minister Kathy Dunderdale, the department also attempted to gather updates on the company over the two weeks that followed the meeting.

"My officials were unable to get a response from Island Aggregates as to their status and any progress it was making in being able to supply limestone to the farmers of the province," Dunderdale stated.

Jones says that the meeting on May 23 was "a very low-level meeting." She maintains that an open dialogue was never achieved with company management and blames the department.

The department has said it's up to the company to reveal who was involved with any meetings between the company and representatives of the department.

No one from Island Aggregates could be reached for comment.

In addition to the cost of the shipments, Jones has also requested information on the quality of the limestone shipped.

When the choice was made not to use a secondary source of available limestone within the province, the reason given was that the quality of the limestone was not at the level required for provincial farmers.