

NOT AGAINST DEVELOPMENT BUT WE NEED A VIBRANT GREEN ECONOMY RESPECTING PROTECTED LANDS

Dear Editor,

We are the Climate Change Task Force Unama'ki/Cape Breton, a group of citizens and organizations who are deeply concerned about environmental degradation and climate change and the impacts on all living beings. We aim to promote environmental awareness and concrete action to combat climate change through education, advocacy, community mobilization, and investment in local green initiatives.

We are troubled to hear that Cabot wants to put a golf course in the West Mabou Beach Provincial Park—an area of high ecological sensitivity and diversity. This protected area is essential to preserve as we enter deeper into the climate crisis. The removal of vegetation, sand dunes, and wetland areas would mean not only a loss of critical habitat, but also a loss of a natural buffer that protects us from the worst impacts of climate change. The loss of this natural buffer is concerning considering we are seeing more frequent and stronger storms that will wreak havoc on our infrastructure (i.e. Hurricane Fiona).

In addition to our concerns related to climate change, the proposal by Cabot is directly infringing on Nova Scotia's commitment to protecting 20% of its land and water by 2030, the Beaches Act, and the proposed Coastal Protection Act. Specifically, the Beaches Act states, "[t]he beaches of Nova Scotia are dedicated in perpetuity for the benefit, education and enjoyment of present and future generations of Nova Scotians." This development will be a terrible precedent set by the Government of Nova Scotia if any protected area can be up for grabs for the sake of economic development. We must start seeing development through a green lens, meaning how we can sustain ourselves and the planet for mutual benefit. This requires shifting to a green economy that recognizes our fundamental dependence on a healthy environment.

Even the Province's most recent plan for parks and protected areas outlines why these regions must be conserved: "Parks and protected areas play an important role in conserving and protecting biodiversity in our part of the world. This includes wildlife, along with natural features and processes. Our protected lands lessen the effects of climate change by capturing and storing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. They maintain clean air and water, including drinking water" (Department of Natural Resources & Nova Scotia Environment, 2013, p. 11).

Aside from the legislative and environmental concerns, we ask whether there was proper and meaningful consultation with Mi'kmaq communities during this proposal phase, and whether Cabot and the Province will engage with the Mi'kmaq Elders and Knowledge Holders going forward. Under the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as Canada's commitments to reconciliation, any project of this scope should include First Nations consultation. It must be acknowledged that consultation does not mean consent.

However, there is one thing to make clear. Most people defending the protected area are not against economic development; rather they do not see developing a protected area as an acceptable location given that this would be in direct violation of provincial legislative

commitments and Acts. If Cabot wants to build a golf course, they can purchase private land in West Mabou or elsewhere, just like any other private business. They have the funds to do so.

Sincerely,
Climate Change Task Force Unama'ki/Cape Breton