



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY  
Newfoundland and Labrador

**James Dinn, M.H.A.**  
**District of St. John's Centre**

February 5, 2026

Tony Wakeham, Premier  
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Confederation Building  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
A1B 4J6

Dear Premier Wakeham,

**Re: Cancellation of South Coast Fjords National Marine Conservation Area**

I am profoundly disappointed with your government's decision to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the feasibility assessment of a proposed South Coast Fjords National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) on the south coast of the island of Newfoundland.

In his news release, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change states that the Provincial Government "...cannot support the establishment of a National Marine Conservation Area ... due to the potential risk it proposes to aquaculture, fishing and mining operations and the impact of the very communities that rely on them." This is an injustice to the residents of Burgeo and surrounding communities who came together 20 years ago and began a process of establishing an NMCA to improve economic sustainability and long-term growth for the area.

This decision appears to have been shaped by misinformation and the failure on the part of your government to consult with members of the NMCA Steering Committee. The mandate of the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate change is to protect the environment not industry. If your government engaged with proponents of the NMCA, you would have learned that your concerns were unfounded and not based on fact.

From the beginning the desire to create an NMCA was a grassroots process led by communities in the area concerned about the environment and their future prosperity. In 2003, the Town of Burgeo submitted a proposal to the federal government. In 2023, a Steering Committee was formed representing the five signees of the MOU and undertook an extensive engagement and consultation process. As a result, the original boundary of

the NMCA was modified to exclude areas identified by the aquaculture industry and fish harvesters. Parks Canada was engaged to carry out a feasibility study but has never been the driver of this process. Federal and provincial elections interrupted the process, and the Steering Committee hoped to resume the study when things returned to normal.

Once completed, two steps remain: negotiate establishment agreements and designate and protect NMCA in legislation. It could take another ten years to complete the process. As stated above, there has been much misinformation by opponents of the NMCA. Accusations that an NMCA would ban all fishing, stop cultural practices, halt economic development, kill jobs and drive away people are fearmongering and false. Misunderstanding has been the result.

Communities are advocating for an NMCA for precisely the opposite reasons: to protect ecosystems while sustaining livelihoods. Proponents have not been opposed to industry development. In a recent interview, Chief Brad Benoit of Miawpukek first Nation and a signatory to the MOU noted the importance of industry and conservation working together for the betterment of the environment.

Opponents deliberately seem to conflate a Marine Protected Area (MPA), which falls under the jurisdiction of DFO and is far more restrictive, with an NMCA (managed by Parks Canada) and designed around collaborative governance. An NMCA is not an MPA. There are only five NMCAs in the entire country. Yet opponents often falsely reference MPAs, such as St. Anne's Bank in Nova Scotia, to bolster their argument. There are no NMCAs in Nova Scotia. The proposed NMCA would be co-managed by a board made up of local, provincial, and federal stakeholders. Unlike an MPA, decisions are not made unilaterally and will use an adaptive management approach.

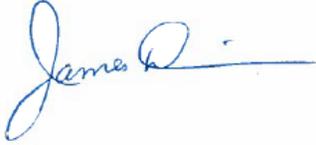
As noted above, changes to the original proposed boundary have already been made after input from the aquaculture industry and fish harvesters. The press release references the proposed redesignation of Sandbanks Provincial Park as a National Park. This was part of the original proposal but no longer will be the case based on consultations and other information. Importantly, less than 5% of the remaining area will be classified as Zone 1 for strict protection like the Penguin Islands MPA. Over 95% would be designated multiple use and would allow such activities as soft aquaculture, commercial fishery that does not employ bottom trawling, and recreational activities.

If we are to preserve our environment for our children and generations to come, then we must be good stewards of our natural resources now. We have seen the harm caused by open sea-pen aquaculture and other destructive activities. No only will an NMCA help protect the environment and secure a future for Burgeo and surrounding communities, it has the real potential to increase fish stocks for fish harvesters.

We urge your government to reverse its decision, allow the completion of the feasibility study, and immediately engage with the Steering Committee, the Town of Burgeo and surrounding communities, and other partners.

I look forward to your reply. Should you wish to have a discussion on this matter I am available at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Dinn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James Dinn, MHA  
St. John's Centre  
Leader, NL NDP

CC Chris Tibbs, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, Community  
Engagement and Environment, Conservation and Climate Change  
Loyola O'Driscoll, Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture