

October 27, 2014

Law Amendments Committee
c/o Gordon Hebb, Q.C.
Chief Legislative Counsel
CIBC Building
1809 Barrington Street, Suite 802
P.O. Box 1116
Halifax NS, B3J 2X1

Dear Minister Diab and members of the Law Amendments Committee,

One of the three main goals of the Chamber's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan is to 'Create a Positive Business Environment'. The goal resonates very strongly with our membership, as they all want to live and work in a province that seeks to maximize the wellbeing of its citizens through new opportunities and investment.

Many businesses have expressed their concern to us over the past few weeks about the government's proposed moratorium on hydraulic fracturing. Our concern is focused not so much on the benefits and drawbacks of fracking, the Wheeler Report made it clear that more research on both is needed, but on the way this decision was reached and communicated. Too many people saw the announcement of the moratorium as yet another example of how Nova Scotia is closed for business.

Our consideration of this opportunity started well, as Nova Scotians we paid for an expert panel to review this issue and Dr. Wheeler produced a balanced response that opened the door for our province to consider this economic opportunity. While more research on Nova Scotia's specific situation is needed, we do know hydraulic fracturing has been an important economic contributor to other jurisdictions with appropriate regulation and community support.

The fact is, as the members of this Committee are all aware, Nova Scotia needs all of the economic opportunity it can get. Our demographic and out-migration issues will never be solved if we cannot keep our young people here and that will not happen without new economic opportunities. While immigration is an important part of our growth and will play a key role in enriching our culture and bringing new ideas and diversity to our communities, even if we double our numbers this will not solve our demographic issues on their own.

We agree that the government should invest in new research but do not believe that the door should be closed on hydraulic fracturing forever. Implementing a strong regulatory regime, funding more research, and talking to communities to see if any of them are interested in the opportunities hydraulic fracturing presents would be a more balanced approach.

To champion a more positive business environment the Chamber started its 'YES' campaign to show the benefits of being open to new ideas. We are calling on the government to say 'YES' to new opportunities and then work out the necessary conditions that will allow these new ideas to go ahead.

The One Nova Scotia Report made it clear that our province is in serious trouble if we do not change our current course. Specifically, our declining population and lack of economic growth will threaten our province's standard of living and level of government services in the years ahead. If we are not willing to at least examine new opportunities, how can we truly hope to change our province's course? If you would like to meet to discuss these issues please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Valerie Payn, President and CEO
Halifax Chamber of Commerce