

January 14, 2005

Mr. Joseph Cordiano  
Minister of Economic Development & Trade  
Hearst Block, Queen's Park  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

Dear Mr. Cordiano

We have previously written to you as well as the Premier and the Minister of Finance, expressing real concern that the Ontario Research Fund is being asked to match a \$3.6 million federal grant for rabies research even though rabies is the lowest public health risk disease in North America. We pointed out that the millions of dollars being sought for infrastructure on behalf of rabies research will mean the entrenchment of even more on-going operational costs for programs that simply do not reflect public priorities.

In less than four years, a collaborative research project between the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Trent University has managed to already garner almost \$6 million in public funds while an additional \$25 million or more has been spent during this same period by the Ontario and federal governments for rabies control and testing programs. This spending reflects the determination of a small number of government scientists, academics and vaccine and bait manufacturers, coupled with a large measure of outlandish fear-mongering and the lack of any independent risk analysis by governments over the last decade. It is important to note that the recipient who was awarded the research grants also sits as a member of the selection committee on one of the granting agencies. This calls into question serious concern about conflict of interest within the granting agencies and adds to the question of the lack of public scrutiny in how tax dollars are spent.

It is bad enough that such substantial public funds are being squandered on such low-priority programs but that it is done in secret among "friends" is deeply disturbing. Therefore, we are writing, at this time, to ask why your government feels the need to hide those that are involved in this research and the nature of that research.

Requests through Freedom of Information have taken almost one year and, in spite of an order by the Information and Privacy Adjudicator that this information be released by December 3, 2004, the OMNR is still withholding it. The Ministry's representations are both bizarre and pathetic in that they use the state of an *"elderly scientist who is upset, anxiety ridden, fearful and unable to sleep and threatens to stop his lifesaving research"* should his name be made public. And then there is the Ministry representation that one of its research partners, *"a commercial trapper who operates a non-profit organization of six members out of his home"*, is *"fearful for his physical safety"* from animal rights activists. Those segments of the Adjudicator's report that pertain to the issues raised here are attached.

In its desperation to justify withholding information on this research, the Ministry, however, crosses the line when it knowingly conveys false information about reputable community organizations and uses these falsehoods to allege these organizations are capable of illegal activity. In its representations to the Adjudicator, the OMNR states *"that a named organization recently committed an illegal act resulting in charges against five members during a recent*

*cormorant cull at a provincial park. The Ministry submits that as the web-site of this organization condemns the Ministry's cormorant cull research and rabies research, it is not imaginary or contrived to think that there is a threat of illegal activity by those opposed to Ministry programs such as rabies research if this information is released".*

The Adjudicator dismissed these arguments with good reason. However, it does not absolve the Ministry of its abusive and dishonest attempted manipulation nor the harassment that is leveled at well-respected community organizations by a Ministry that is determined to muzzle any criticism of its programs or any demands for public accountability and transparency. The facts are: the five members mentioned are with Earth Roots and the charges of minor trespass (their canoe drifted over an arbitrary line set by the MNR) were dismissed on May 17, 2004; another individual, with the Peaceful Parks organization was charged when she handed out pamphlets to the public at the site. These charges were not only dismissed on July 8, 2004 but the Justice of the Peace, in deciding that there were not grounds to believe an offence had been committed, strongly criticized the Officer laying the charge: *"In my view that's abusive. She was ordered not to come. The Officer was ordered to instruct her not to come, that she wasn't required to come. That phone call isn't made and what they couldn't get in the front door they got in the back door by having her attend today and serving a summons on her. So, it's my position it's abusive. She's not required to attend on this charge. I'm ordering an Officer, I don't care who it is, Mr. Fordham, phone this woman, Ms. Valastro, or send correspondence and instruct her she is not required to attend as a result of this, on the date that was set for her."* A transcript of these proceedings is attached.

Why does the Ministry of Natural Resources see the need to go to such dishonest lengths to withhold information on research that is funded by the public purse? What is it attempting to hide? Of perhaps greater importance, why is the McGuinty Government so determined to continue to pour millions of dollars into such low-priority research and to squander it on projects where the principals involved go to such unethical and desperate lengths to withhold information on their partners and the research being done.

The Ontario government should embark on a comprehensive review and audit of the Ministry of Natural Resources actions as they pertain to rabies research, control and testing – **not** endorsing these questionable practices with more public money.

We will be watching with interest your up-coming decision on spending a further \$3.6 million of Ontario taxpayers' money for this research.

Sincerely

Donna DuBreuil, President  
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

c.c. Premier Dalton McGuinty  
The Honourable Greg Sorbara  
The Honourable Michael Bryant  
Mr. Richard Patten, MPP Ottawa Centre  
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Enclosures Representations made by the MNR to the  
Information and Privacy Commissioner  
Court Transcript