

To my Member of the Legislative Assembly,

I am deeply concerned that the current Government of Alberta has failed to react to the abnormal cancer rates in Albertans living in the northern community of Fort Chipewyan. In 2009 Alberta Health Services released a study on the growing cancer rates in Fort Chip that states:

“the number of cancer cases observed in Fort Chipewyan was higher than expected for all cancers combined and for specific types of cancer, such as biliary tract cancer and cancers in the blood and lymphatic system. In particular, increases were found for biliary tract cancer in men and for lung cancer in women. This increase was based on a small number of cases and could be due to chance or increased detection. **The possibility that the increased rate of cancer is due to increased risk in the community, however, cannot be ruled out.** An increased number of cases of biliary tract cancers, cancers in the blood and lymphatic system and cancers of unknown primary seen in the most recent six years (2001-2006) compared to the first six years (1995-2000) of the study period **warrant closer monitoring of cancer occurrence in upcoming years.**”

This Government was given an opportunity to stand up for the health of Albertans. Alberta Health Services has developed a clear set of critiques and suggestions to further the investigation of the increased cancer rates in the Athabasca Delta. Alberta Health Services suggested that the province closely study the impacts of environmental factors such as oil sands development on the community's health. However, the Government immediately refused to do so. The honorable member for Edmonton-Whitemud (Dave Hancock) defended the Government's stance in an email sent in February 2009 saying that:

“At this time, **there is no indication that industrial activities in the lower Athabasca watershed cause concentrations of contaminants that exceed normal levels for that area.** Furthermore, Alberta Environment is **leading a study of aquatic and terrestrial contaminants in the lower Athabasca watershed.** Other agencies are also engaged to ensure that standards, guidelines and regulatory frameworks protect human and ecological health. These efforts range from developing, updating and implementing air, soil and water quality objectives to implementing provincial and regional environmental management frameworks.”

Mr. Hancock is standing by the results provided by Regional Aquatic Monitoring Program (RAMP). This program has been responsible for monitoring aquatic ecosystems surrounding oil sand development since 1997. RAMP consistently reports that the effects of the upstream oil sand developments are minimal, and that natural sources cause elevated contaminant concentrations in the Athabasca and its tributaries, and that human health and the environment are not at risk from oil sand development. I might find this comforting if the credibility of RAMP and its findings were not in question by peer scientists. RAMP's latest Peer-Review found the program to be plagued with serious scientific and methodological

problems, such as providing a **“lack of details of methods, failure to describe rationales for program changes, examples of inappropriate statistical analysis, and unsupported conclusions.”**

Furthermore, it concluded that:

**“In the current state, RAMP is not in a position to measure and assess development-related change locally or in a cumulative way.** Reviewers reported serious problems related to scientific leadership and a lack of integration and consistency across components with respect to approach, design, implementation, and analysis. Reviewers also reported a **lack of an overall regional plan, that clear questions were not been addressed** in the monitoring and that there were sometimes significant shortfalls with respect to statistical design of the individual components.”

Dr. David Schindler; a world-renowned water expert and leading scientist at the University of Alberta, conducted an independent study on the effect oil sands development has on contaminant levels in the Athabasca during the spring of 2008. He concluded that:

**“the oil sands development is a greater source of contamination than previously realized and that major changes are needed to the way that environmental impacts of the oil sands development are monitored and managed.”**

Schindler has proven that over a four month period airborne particulates accounted for 391kg of polycyclic aromatic compounds (PAC) in the snowpack fifty kilometers around oil sand upgrading facilities. His results show that dissolved PAC concentrations in the Athabasca have also increased, especially in areas adjacent to tailings ponds. PACs occur in oil, coal, and tar deposits, and are produced as byproducts of fuel burning (whether fossil fuel or biomass). As a pollutant, they are of concern because some compounds have been identified as carcinogenic, mutagenic, and teratogenic, and thus extremely dangerous to human health.

David Hancock responded in his February email that:

**“The Government of Alberta is committed to environmental sustainability and ensuring the quality of our water sources. Water quality in the oil sands region has been monitored since the early 1970s, and current water quality in the lower Athabasca River near Fort Chipewyan is rated as good.”**

If this Government is sincere in this statement, then the required action should be clear. Take this problem seriously. Do not stand by RAMP data that has been considered inaccurate by peers, and proven wrong by experts. Alberta Health Services, the Peer Review of RAMP and Dr. David Schindler have all concluded that the way this Government monitors its aquatic ecosystems needs to be redeveloped and we need to study the impacts of development on the health of Fort Chipewyan residents. Launch a baseline health study of Fort Chipewyan, so we

can identify what is behind the community's deteriorating health. We cannot exclude the role of environmental factors such as oil sands development until we actually study its effects. I hope this Government will take this opportunity to stand up for the health of Albertans and do what is right.

I look forward to your reply.

Concerned constituent.