

NSARB-2022-AFF-003

**TOWN POINT CONSULTING INC. for NEW MARINE SHELLFISH LICENCES/LEASES in
ANTIGONISH HARBOUR, ANTIGONISH COUNTY**

**Antigonish Oyster Community Liaison Committee
Presentation
By
Stephen Feist, Chair of CLC**

The Antigonish Oyster Community Liaison Committee arose from concerns raised by a few individuals at the first public meeting at St. Francis Xavier University on August 16, 2019. At that meeting, a few of the presenters had made a number of statements regarding the size of the potential oyster operation, the impact it would have on the Antigonish Harbour environment, concerns about the use of hormones in the oyster operation, the excrement from the oysters polluting the harbour, the disruption of pleasure boating and other fisheries.

As a consequence of that meeting a few individuals met and decided to establish the Community Liaison Committee, as an arms-length committee to allow open dialogue between Town Point Oysters and local communities following the principles of Nova Scotia Environment's Guide for the Formation and Operation of a Community Liaison Committee. Our goal is to ensure that the public has access to fact-based and scientific information on the oyster aquaculture operation proposed by Town Point Oysters.

We advertised in the local paper, on the local radio stations and on local public bulletin boards to encourage individuals to join the committee. We even reached out to The Friends of Antigonish Harbour by posting the notice on their FaceBook page (3 times) to join the committee. Our committee includes the following wide range of local residents:

- Stephen Feist - CLC Chair: Past CAO for the Town of Antigonish and active member of the Antigonish Legion
- Sean Day - Co-Chair: Former Planner at the Town of Antigonish, current president of the Antigonish Boat Club which operates from Seabright on Antigonish Harbour
- Dr. David Garbury: Biology Professor at St. FX and head of the Aquatic Resources Program, and over the past 30 years has carried out numerous research projects in and around Antigonish Harbour.
- Hughie Stewart: Deputy Warden of the Municipality of the Country of Antigonish who takes interest in any project that affects the county and its residents. He has lived in Antigonish County for 73 years, has been a business owner for 50 years, and a representative in District 3 for 22 years. Through business interests and political committees, he has a vested interest in the municipality and its growth.
- Owen McCarren: Warden of the Municipality of the County of Antigonish and recently retired as Area Manager of the Dept. of Natural Resources.

- Archie Mackenzie: fisherman, a quarry operator, and an active member of several fishing-related organizations. Having fished commercially for many decades, both in the lobster fishery as well as holding licenses for Silversides, smelts, and eels within Antigonish harbour.
- Marc Genuist: Marc is a retired CBC journalist who has lived in Antigonish part-time for 15 years and permanently for 5 years. Marc and his partner live in Town Point. Their waterfront property has a direct view over two of the proposed lease site of the harbour they use the harbour regularly to swim and kayak. Marc is a Director and Member of the Board of the Strait Area Search and Rescue.
- Jim Lerikos: He is the past president of The Antigonish River Association, Director, and past president of the Antigonish Eastern Shore Tourist Association, past member of VON, and a current member of the North Eastern Christmas Tree Association. Jim is an avid angler and duck hunter who frequently hunts and fishes on Antigonish Harbour.
- Dr. Roger Porter: He is a member of the Antigonish River Association and The Ecology Action Center. Dr Porter has fished and hunted on and around Antigonish harbour for several decades. He is a retired dentist whose practice was in the town of Antigonish.
- Paul Maclsaac: Senior Aquatic Operations Technician at Dalhousie University, Faculty of Agriculture. Paul has a Bachelor of Science degree in biology (St.FX), a Master of Science in fish physiology (AVC/UPEI) and 27 years of experience in the Nova Scotia aquaculture sector.
- Ryan Smith: Local resident and former executive assistant for Randy Delory a previous MLA for Antigonish region.

To facilitate a good flow of information, the committee has established a website (<https://www.antigonishoysterclc.com/>) and a FaceBook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AntigonishOysterCLC/>), where we believe we have addressed most of the concerns raised by various interest groups. Our goal has been to be open to the public to the operation and discussions of the CLC.

On our website, we have posted our meetings with the minutes available for each meeting for the public to review, including:

- August 23rd, 2021 - Public Meeting with 59 members of the public attending(including video of the meeting)
- CLC Meeting April 15, 2021
- CLC Meeting December 6, 2020
- CLC Meeting November 15, 2020

The website also includes a section for Responses, where the committee has identified various concerns raised by the public at public meetings, in postings on other websites and in articles in the local newspapers. As you can see on the CLC website, the committee has addressed these numerous concerns, which I encourage the Board to review. If I was to go over each concern

and response, I believe it would be a repetition of what has been stated already, but I do think there are a few themes that are worth repeating:

- As oysters are filter feeders, they are a keystone species that provide critical ecological services to their environment. They will improve the quality of water in Antigonish Harbour and provide synergistic benefits to other important species including eelgrass. We have seen many examples of oysters being used to improve coastal ecosystems along the American eastern seaboard.
- The studies on the eel grass are ongoing, but preliminary results indicate that the impact on the eelgrass in Antigonish Harbour will be at worst benign and may be beneficial.
- The proposed operation will not be using any chemicals or additives that would be harmful to any other aquatic species.
- The proposed location of the oyster operation will be in the shallower areas of the harbour, where boating traffic avoids, therefore it will not have a negative impact on recreational boating. And for the kayakers and canoes, the design will allow them to paddle through the leased areas without difficulty.
- The proposed oyster operation is unlikely to have a negative impact on migratory or permanent bird life.
- The proposed oyster farm will be locally owned and operated and provide year-round employment including, animal husbandry tasks, cleaning, packing, shipping, sales, marketing, accounting, and management.
- The proposed BOBR units have a low profile in the water. This technology will have a minimal visual impact from the shore or water, and the design will have a minimised impact on sunlight penetration to the bottom for the eelgrass. As the growth units will have a buoyancy that keeps them raised off of the seabed, there is expected to be minimal impact on the benthic environment during overwintering.

The CLC website also includes six video presentations from Jim Williams, a Senior Research Professor at StFX, who addresses some of the concerns people have about the proposed oyster farm in Antigonish Harbour. These presentations include:

1. Life History of Oysters
2. Oysters and Nutrients
3. Oyster Aquaculture
4. Oysters and Shading (part 1)
5. Oysters and Shading (part 2)
6. Conclusions
 - a. Increased clarity of the water can be expected with this oyster proposal
 - b. With increased water clarity, Eelgrass could benefit from decreased epiphytic growth
 - c. The natural oyster population could benefit from the increased number of oyster larvae being produced by the TPO proposal

- d. All estuaries such as Antigonish Harbour are robust environments, estuaries are very dynamic with changes in salinity, suspended sediment, temperature changes due to rainstorms and tidal changes
- e. A research project by St. Fx. has done baseline data and with the Oyster Proposal further studies can be completed

Based on these our assessment of presentations and dialogue during our public meeting and the two other public meetings associated with this proposal as well as our review of all known concerns done by the committee, at the CLC meeting on September 23, 2021, the Committee felt that many of the concerns raised by the opposition group and individuals to the proposal had been substantially addressed. On October 2nd, 2021, the committee subsequently sent letters to the Honourable Steve Craig, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture requesting that it was time to move forward with the application.

Retired Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Antigonish

I would now like to add a few other comments that I believe are pertinent to the Board's Consideration of this application.

As the CAO for the Town of Antigonish, one of my goals was to encourage diverse economic development for the Antigonish Area. This included working with adjacent municipalities (Towns of Port Hawkesbury and Mulgrave and the Municipalities of Guysborough, Inverness, Richmond, St. Mary's and Antigonish). The main focus of our work was to create a climate for economic development to ensure that our youth could remain in the area, rather than having to relocate to the Halifax area or out of province for employment.

The Town Point Oysters' proposal will provide an opportunity for greater economic development and diversity. Their proposal for the oyster operation in Antigonish Harbour is environmentally sustainable, economically beneficial, appropriate in location and scale, is optimum use of our marine resources and is based on the preponderance of positive community feedback broadly available to the CLC (other than that emanating from one special interest group) is supported by our community. In addition, they will be using Antigonish Harbour as a demonstration site for DockPort's new BOBR (Benefit Of Being Round) growth units for the oysters.

The Oyster operation along with the BOBR demonstration site, marketing and sales will have a tremendous economic impact on the Antigonish Area, from both direct and indirect economic growth. And the best part about this proposal is that it is environmentally sustainable.

Board member of the Antigonish Boat Club

I have been an avid kayaker and sailor in Antigonish Harbour for over 12 years, and I believe the Town Point Oyster proposal will have little impact on boating in the harbour. The proposed location of the BOBR fields is in those areas where few sailboats or motorboats would venture because it tends to be rather shallow. In addition, the design of the BOBR lines would allow kayaks and canoes to traverse the area without any problem. The low profile of the BOBR system visually will not have any significant impact on the views of Antigonish Harbour.

In the past 7 years, I have retired and been able to enjoy the harbour more frequently and I believe it is worth noting, that half of the time that I have been on the harbour, I have been the only one boating. When there are other boaters, if I see 5 or more that is an unusual day, and that is usually when boaters have launched their boats from the cove near Dunn's Beach and head directly to the open ocean through the channel and not venturing further into the harbour.

On a final point, due to the activities surrounding Antigonish Harbour, the water has a high concentration of nutrients, which results in the water being murky with algae. As the oysters are a filter feeder, I see this as an opportunity to improve the clarity of the water in Antigonish Harbour for both boaters and swimming activities. Using oysters to improve water quantity has been before in the USA with great success.

Conclusion

I believe this is an environmentally sustainable venture, according to scientific knowledge and literature available to the CLC the effect will be at worst benign and is likely to be beneficial. It may in fact go towards cleaning the harbour as demonstrated elsewhere in the USA.

This proposal will also have a positive impact, both directly and indirectly on the economy of the Antigonish Area.

I also believe this proposal will not adversely impact the boater's enjoyment of Antigonish Harbour.

From the perspective of the CLC Chairperson, Former CAO for the Town of Antigonish and Board Member of the Antigonish Boat Club, I encourage the Nova Scotia Aquaculture Review Board to approve the Town Point Oyster's proposal for Antigonish Harbour.