THE HONOURABLE KEITH C. NORTON, Q.C.
MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A STATEMENT TO THE LEGISLATURE

ON THE

NEW EVIDENCE OF CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION IN FISH

APRIL 1, 1982

MR. SPEAKER:

LAST OCTOBER I REPORTED TO HONOURABLE MEMBERS ON THE RESULTS UP TO THAT TIME OF MY MINISTRY'S COMPREHENSIVE TESTING PROGRAMS FOR CHEMICALS IN FISH. I WISH TODAY TO BRING THAT INFORMATION UP TO DATE.

I WOULD EMPHASIZE, AT THE OUTSET, TWO POSITIVE FACTORS: ONE, THE INCREASING ABILITY OF OUR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTISTS TO DETECT AND ANALYZE MINUTE QUANTITIES OF A WIDE RANGE OF CHEMICALS, AND, TWO, THE HIGH PRIORITY THAT HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO THIS CONTINUING AND EXPANDING ACTIVITY.

I WILL DESCRIBE THE RESULTS OF TWO SERIES OF TESTS, ONE ON MINNOWS FROM THE CANADIAN AND AMERICAN SIDES OF THE NIAGARA RIVER AND ONE ON SPORT FISH IN LAKE ONTARIO, THE NIAGARA RIVER, THE GRAND RIVER AND LAKE SUPERIOR.

SPOTTAIL SHINER MINNOWS TAKEN FROM THE NIAGARA RIVER CONTAINED TRACE LEVELS OF THE CHEMICAL KNOWN AS DIOXIN 2,3,7,8-TCDD. OUR SCIENTISTS ARE SATISFIED THAT THE DIOXIN ORIGINATED ON THE NEW YORK SIDE OF THE RIVER AS THE RESULT OF PREVIOUS DISPOSAL PRACTICES AT SITES ASSOCIATED WITH CHEMICAL COMPANIES IN THE BUFFALO-NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK AREA.

FISH SPECIES FROM LAKE ONTARIO AND FROM THE LOWER NIAGARA RIVER CONTAINED 2,3,7,8-TCDD BUT IN NO CASE, EXCEPT IN THE LAKE TROUT FROM THE PORT CREDIT AREA, DID THE AVERAGE VALUE EXCEED THE 20 PARTS PER TRILLION FEDERAL GUIDELINE. NO DIOXIN WAS DETECTED IN FISH FROM THE GRAND RIVER NEAR WATERLOO AND TRACE LEVELS OF 1 OR 2 PARTS PER TRILLION WERE MEASURED IN 3 OF 11 LAKE TROUT FROM LAKE SUPERIOR.

NIAGARA RIVER AND LAKE ONTARIO DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES WERE TESTED FOR 2,3,7,8-TCDD AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS FOUND IN THE MINNOWS AND SPORT FISH. DIOXIN WAS NOT FOUND IN ANY WATER SAMPLE AT OR ABOVE THE DETECTION LIMIT OF 0.2 PARTS PER TRILLION. MIREX AND DDT WERE NOT FOUND IN ANY WATER SAMPLES. PCB HAS BEEN MEASURED OCCASIONALLY IN LAKE ONTARIO WATERS BUT CONCENTRATIONS ARE MUCH BELOW THE INTERIM ONTARIO DRINKING WATER OBJECTIVE OF 0.003MG/L.

HOWEVER, FINDINGS FOR 11 LAKE TROUT COLLECTED IN THE PORT CREDIT AREA OF WESTERN LAKE ONTARIO ARE OF PARTICULAR CONCERN. DIOXIN 2,3,7,8-TCDD IN THESE FISH AVERAGED 27.4 PARTS PER TRILLION, WITH INDIVIDUAL VALUES RANGING FROM 17 TO 57 PPT.

THESE FINDINGS MARK THE FIRST TIME IN THE MINISTRY'S DIOXIN TESTING PROGRAM THAT THE AVERAGE CONCENTRATION OF A SAMPLING OF FISH EXCEEDS THE 20 PPT FEDERAL GUIDELINE. THESE TROUT ALSO EXCEED THE UNRESTRICTED CONSUMPTION GUIDELINES FOR THE CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES PCB AND MIREX.

MEDICAL SPECIALISTS WITH THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF LABOUR WERE CONSULTED BY MY STAFF AND HAVE RECOMMENDED THE CONTINUATION OF "LIMITED CONSUMPTION" ADVICE FOR LAKE TROUT FROM THE PORT CREDIT AREA AS DEFINED IN THE OCTOBER, 1981, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BULLETIN.

THIS RECOMMENDS THAT AN ADULT MALE SHOULD CONSUME ONLY ONE OR TWO MEALS OF LAKE TROUT A MONTH AND THAT NO LAKE TROUT CAUGHT IN THE AREA SHOULD BE CONSUMED BY WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE OR BY CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 15. ANGLERS AND CONSUMERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSULT THE "GUIDE TO EATING ONTARIO SPORT FISH" PUBLISHED BY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT FOR ADVICE ON CONSUMPTION OF SPECIFIC SPECIES AT SPECIFIC LOCATIONS.

PCB AND DIOXIN CONCENTRATIONS IN MINNOWS FROM CAYUGA CREEK, NEW YORK, WHICH CONTAINS DRAINAGE FROM THE LOVE CANAL AREA, REINFORCE CONCERNS ABOUT SEEPAGE OF CONTAMINANTS FROM INDUSTRIAL WASTE DISPOSAL SITES.

THE DIOXIN LEVEL, AVERAGING 59 PARTS PER TRILLION OF 2,3,7,8-TCDD AT THE CAYUGA CREEK SITE, WAS FOUR TIMES HIGHER THAN DIOXIN IN MINNOWS FROM OTHER NIAGARA RIVER LOCATIONS SAMPLED IN 1981.

DIOXIN WAS NOT DETECTED IN SPOTTAIL SHINERS COLLECTED IN THE NANTICOKE AREA OF EASTERN LAKE ERIE, WHICH IS UPSTREAM FROM AND UNAFFECTED BY INDUSTRIAL WASTE LOSSES TO THE NIAGARA RIVER.

THE CURRENT TEST SPORT FISH RESULTS SUPPORT EARLIER TESTS WHICH SHOWED THAT LEVELS OF 2,3,7,8,-TCDD ARE HIGHER IN LAKE ONTARIO FISH THAN IN FISH FROM OTHER ONTARIO WATER BODIES TESTED AND THEY SUPPORT THE OPINION THAT INDUSTRIAL WASTE DISPOSAL SOURCES IN THE NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK, AREA ARE THE MAIN SOURCE OF THIS CHEMICAL IN LAKE ONTARIO FISH.

AS I HAVE STATED, OUR DRINKING WATER IS SAFE AND OF GOOD QUALITY. I AM CONCERNED, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE POTENTIAL LONG-TERM PROBLEMS WHICH THESE INCREASED LEVELS OF DIOXIN IN FISH MAY PRESENT.

CONSISTENT WITH MY CONCERN, I WOULD LIKE TO OUTLINE FOR HONOURABLE MEMBERS SOME OF THE STEPS I HAVE TAKEN SO THAT THERE WILL BE NO DOUBT IN ANYONE'S MIND ABOUT HOW SERIOUSLY I VIEW THESE DEVELOPMENTS.

THESE NEW DIOXIN FINDINGS BY OUR ONTARIO SCIENTISTS ARE BEING COMMUNICATED IMMEDIATELY TO THE CANADIAN MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT, THE HONOURABLE JOHN ROBERTS, AND TO THE APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS OF THE UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY AND THE NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION.

IN ADDITION, I HAVE INSTRUCTED MY OFFICIALS TO SEND COPIES TO ALL OF THE U.S. AND CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS INVOLVED IN RECENT JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS ON NIAGARA RIVER POLLUTION PROBLEMS.

I AM SEEKING, AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE DATE, A MEETING WITH THE HONOURABLE ROBERT FLACKE, COMMISSIONER OF THE NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, TO DISCUSS NEW AND URGENT PRIORITIES FOR POLLUTION CRACKDOWNS.

IN ADDITION, PREMIER DAVIS WILL RAISE THE QUESTION OF DISCHARGE TO THE NIAGARA RIVER AT HIS PENDING MEETING WITH GOVERNOR CAREY OF NEW YORK STATE.

THE PREMIER HAS ACCEPTED AN INVITATION FROM THE GOVERNOR OF MICHIGAN, MR. MILLIKEN, TO PARTICIPATE IN A MEETING ON MACKINAC ISLAND ABOUT GREAT LAKE PROBLEMS. WE WILL TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE OUR CONCERNS OVER TRANS-BOUNDARY POLLUTION, AND ESPECIALLY THE QUESTION OF CHEMICAL DISCHARGES INTO THE NIAGARA RIVER RAISED BY OUR CURRENT FINDINGS.

THE U.S.-CANADA NIAGARA RIVER TOXICS COMMITTEE IS CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF LONG-RANGE PLANS FOR THE CONTROL OF HAZARDOUS CONTAMINANTS IN THE NIAGARA RIVER AND ONTARIO WILL CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN HEARINGS HELD IN THE U.S. TO DEAL WITH POLLUTION OF THE RIVER.

THE HONOURABLE MEMBERS WILL RECALL THAT IN NOVEMBER I ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC TEAM TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF POLLUTION OF THE NIAGARA RIVER AND TO ENSURE THAT THE QUALITY OF THIS RIVER IS PROTECTED AND IMPROVED.

MY MINISTRY'S NIAGARA RIVER IMPROVEMENT TEAM HAS BEEN IN OPERATION FOR SOME MONTHS AND I HAVE NOW EXPANDED THIS TEAM TO INCLUDE A HYDROGEOLOGIST TO ZERO IN ON THE SUSPECTED SOURCE OF CONTAMINATION ON THE NEW YORK SIDE, INCLUDING THE HYDE PARK AND LOVE CANAL DUMP SITES.

OUR SCIENTISTS ARE CONVINCED THAT THIS DIOXIN ORIGINATED AND IS CONTINUING TO ENTER OUR WATERS FROM AMERICAN SOURCES. OUR FINDINGS GIVE CLEAR INDICATION OF A POTENTIAL LONG-TERM PROBLEM. CHEMICAL SOURCES IN NEW YORK STATE MUST COME UNDER TIGHTER CONTROL AND SOME ADDITIONAL CLEAN-UP MAY BE NECESSARY.

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