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Media Release

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Stratford Followed Protocols for Sludge Removal

The Town of Stratford is committed to following proper protocols and working with regulating bodies in all aspects of service delivery. All work at the Stratford Waste Water Treatment Plant is only undertaken with approvals in place prior to the work beginning, as was the case in recent weeks during a sludge removal process. Unfortunately, even having done so a temporary closure of the shellfish fishery in the Hillsborough River has occurred. Although there appears to be a perception that a dump into the river took place, this did not occur.

“We do not take this situation lightly,” said Stratford Mayor Steve Ogden. “We are sorry that the timing of the sludge removal project did not allow for sufficient time to lapse before the fishery opening. As with many industries, it is an already tough period due to COVID-19 and we apologize to the affected fishers for this incident.”

The following timeline outlines the sludge removal project and steps taken since early April 2020 to get it approved and underway:

- The Sludge Removal Report was finalized on April 11, 2020, and submitted to the Department of Environment on April 23, 2020, after Town staff had time to review the information.
- After the Department of Environment reviewed the information there was a collective decision to remove the sludge that had accumulated in cell #2 of the Waste Water Treatment Plant.
- As a result of COVID-19 restrictions and the review process, the Certificate of Approval was not issued by the Province of PEI until May 14, 2020.
- The Town immediately informed the contractor, located outside of PEI, to proceed. With mobilization and COVID-19 restrictions and concerns, they were not able to start the work until May 22, 2020.
- The work was scheduled to take approximately seven days but ceased after only five days as the fishery was scheduled to open on June 1, 2020. At the beginning of the sludge removal project, we were advised that the fishery might not open until June 8, 2020.
- Under ideal conditions and timing, the Town of Stratford allows for seven days between the end of sludge removal operations and the start-up of the fishery but with the delays in operations and the uncertainty of when the season would open, operations ceased on May 27, 2020, which left only five days prior to the fishery re-opening.
- Because the project was shut down early, all of the sludge was not able to be removed, and there were only five days for the suspended material to settle out. This may have contributed to the elevated sample results that triggered the Conditional Management Plan which in turn led to DFO and Environment Canada putting a closure of the fishery in place on June 2, 2020. Town staff notified the proper authorities as soon as an elevated sample was returned.

- Another contributing factor is the annual spring turnover within the lagoon system that can cause a disruption in the treatment process. Staff are working hard to adjust the system as they do every year to try to get the suspended solids to settle and bring the sample results back down so the fishery can be re-opened.

The sludge removal process, and prior investigation into the sludge levels in the Town's lagoons, were initiated by the Town of Stratford with the intended result of better effluent results, which would have lessened the chances of a closure in the harbour. Unfortunately, the delays incurred did not work in favour of this result this season.

"The Town of Stratford, in cooperation with the provincial and federal governments, is spending millions of dollars on a long-term solution," added Mayor Ogden. "As residents are aware, this project is well underway and we will soon be connected to the system in Charlottetown, eliminating these issues in the future."

The project to pipe sewage from Stratford to the Charlottetown Pollution Control Plant is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2020.

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