

Sediment will be cleaned up

Baird says government will provide \$3.3M to address pollutants in St. Clair River

By CATHY DOBSON

The Observer

Contaminated sediment along an eight-kilometre stretch of the St. Clair River will finally be cleaned up 23 years after it was identified as a concern, Canada's Environment Minister announced in Sarnia Saturday.

John Baird said the federal government is providing \$3.3 million to immediately address mercury and other organic pollutants along the shoreline from Dow's property to Corunna.

"We are committed not to talk, not to study but to take direct action on environmental remediation," said Baird.

He told a crowd of about 75 community leaders gathered at the St. Clair Corporate Centre that he understands that water quality is important to the economy and wellbeing of Sarnia-Lambton residents.

"Unfortunately the river is not as healthy as it should be. Urbanization, heavy industry and agriculture have all taken their toll," he said.

While studies of the pollutants were done in the 1990s and industry has taken steps to clean up its own contaminants, no government money has been spent on remediation yet.

Baird said the \$3.3 million is a "starting point".

"We can't stop here. To succeed, we need to explore collaboration with provincial and local stakeholders," he said.

Baird is announcing several other water remediation projects across Ontario this week but the Harper government's investment in the St. Clair River is one of the largest.

The 2007 budget included \$18 million for the clean up of seven sites, including the St. Clair River, aid Roger Santiago, a sediment remediation specialist with Environment Canada.

He will work with numerous organizations including the Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association, the province, the Aamjiwnaang and Walpole Island natives to determine the best way to deal with the contaminated sediment.

There are numerous pockets of pollutants along the eight-kilometre stretch that will likely require different types of treatment, Santiago said.

“Dredging might be involved, we may cap it or let it recover naturally. Those decisions will be made over the next year,” he said.

Baird said that by 2010 he wants the physical clean-up to start and be completed by 2012.

He credited local MPs Pat Davidson and Bev Shipley for advocating for the money and convincing government the St. Clair requires a large investment.

“This is wonderful news,” Davidson said. “Local industry has stepped up to the plate. Now the federal government is here as well.

“It’s something we need for our community, for our children and for our future in Sarnia-Lambton.”

St. Clair Township Mayor Steve Arnold said he believes Ottawa is making the St. Clair River a priority.

“This is not a token amount,” he said. “I look forward to more funding,”