

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Task Force Report on the Future of the Canadian Wheat Board

“A Waste of Human Energy”

Ottawa, ON: Alex Atamanenko, Member of Parliament for BC Southern Interior –

NDP Agriculture Critic, says the Harper team has wasted tax dollars on a hollow task force report which refuses to recognize the limited powers of a minority government to legally implement any of the recommendations they have put forward. “This report is an incredible waste of human energy which accomplishes little but adds considerable confusion to the whole issue of the future of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB)”, stated Atamanenko

“The Conservatives are well aware of the fact that without a majority they cannot deconstruct the Canadian Wheat Board through legislation without the support of Parliament. That’s why for some time now they have been employing a strategy designed to inject confusion and chaos into the daily lives of the CWB directors and the 85,000 farmers they are mandated to represent”, observed Atamanenko. He pointed to a few of the government actions taken against the CWB to emphasize the lengths they have taken to act outside of their limited legislative means:

- July 27 roundtable stacked with the anti-Wheat Board Corporate grain companies.
- Creation of a severely unbalanced Task Force who are given only 4 weeks to create a whole new marketing strategy for the grain industry and provide a report
- Imposing a change to the rules of a director election process half way through the election and making it very cumbersome for a third of the eligible farmers to vote.
- Lying that the CWB supported this action when the facts show that the Minister of Agriculture was advised by the board to make any changes to the election rules or voters lists months before the election began.
- Imposing a gag order on the CWB to prevent them from advocating on behalf of farmers and then timing the release of the anti-Wheat Board task force report to be released near the actual CWB director election time.
- Firing an appointed Wheat Board director, Ross Keith, a single desk supporter a year before his appointment ends.

The task force report admits that there will be winners and losers as part of any adjustment to marketing choice. They make it clear that there are many competitors who

will have an advantage over the CWB and there will be a significant risk of failure if they are not well prepared to enter into the new competitive environment. “Why would any business, farming or otherwise, willingly give up a tried and true system which has been proven to have significant benefits in order to adopt a new system fraught with uncertainty”, questioned Atamanenko.

One aspect of the report stated that the success of the CWB would depend on producer support investing in 100 million shares valued at a \$1 each. “Producers might be hesitant to buy \$1 shares to invest in such an uncertain future”, noted Atamanenko. “I’m also concerned that the CWB will be just another grain company with no power to secure and maintain quality world markets”.

Absent in the report is any sign of an impact analysis on farmers throughout any of the four stages of the recommendations. “If there is an increase in rail rates to put them on par with the US, how will that affect the Port of Churchill and how many jobs will be lost”, questioned Atamanenko. “How will farmers fare when they find themselves at the mercy of the multi-nationals who set the prices?”

There is a question of whether a minority of aggressive free-enterprising individuals should be allowed to destroy a working system within which the majority of farmers benefit. “This is not the USA where the philosophy of “survival of the fittest” prevails. We have worked out a co-operative approach in Canada which has become a part of our national identity,” noted Atamanenko. “Farmers today are suffering not because of collective marketing but because of an unfair advantage in the world market place due to foreign subsidies and support programs. Taking away the CWB will only put our farmers at a greater disadvantage.”

Another disturbing recommendation in the report is for the Government to immediately start a marketing campaign to promote the recommendations in this report. “Nowhere in sight is the opportunity for 85,000 farmers to express their views through a plebiscite. Instead they will see the government spend tax dollars to advertise and promote the means to an end of 60 years of progressive marketing innovation under the Canadian Wheat Board whose only mandate is to work solely in the best interests of farmers.” stated Atamanenko.

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