

**Email Message**

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**Sent:** 10/21/2016 at 1:11 PM  
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**Subject:** Letter from the Honourable Perry Trimper

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**Attachments:** Letter to Dr. Drew Faust - Harvard University.PDF

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Good Afternoon, Dr. Faust,

Please see the attached letter from the Honourable Perry Trimper, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, regarding Methylmercury Research - Dr. Elsie Sunderland. Thank you.

Fanny

Fanny Hoddinott  
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Record Number : SC-2016-656  
Title : Letter to Dr. Drew Faust - Harvard University



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Department of Environment and Climate Change  
Office of the Minister

COR-2016-1410

OCT 21 2016

Dr. Drew Faust  
President of Harvard University  
Massachusetts Hall  
Harvard Yard  
Cambridge, MA 02138 USA  
[president@harvard.edu](mailto:president@harvard.edu)

Dear Dr. Faust:

**RE: Methylmercury Research – Dr. Elsie Sunderland**

I write to draw your attention to a matter of great importance to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Our province is constructing the Muskrat Falls Project, an 824 megawatt hydro-electric project on the Churchill River in Labrador. Researchers from Harvard University have become involved in this project, in particular Dr. Elsie Sunderland, Thomas D. Cabot Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Engineering. Dr. Sunderland and the members of her team conducted research in relation to the creation of methylmercury associated with the flooding of 41 square kilometres of land as the project progresses. Over the past six months, we have had telephone conference calls with Dr. Sunderland and officials of the Nunatsiavut Government (an Aboriginal Government within our province) in which she presented findings from her published and unpublished research on methylmercury. She also presented the same research to an Expert Workshop held in our province on August 4, 2016. Numerous Canadian federal and provincial government regulators and experts attended the Workshop.

Recently, my department prepared an enhanced environmental monitoring plan to measure methylmercury levels associated with the hydro-electric project. On October 3, 2016, Dr. Sunderland participated in a teleconference call with my Department officials, along with officials of the Nunatsiavut Government. During that conference call, she offered advice concerning our plan to the Nunatsiavut Government. Comments subsequently provided by the Nunatsiavut Government on our plan included the proposal to obtain soil samples from the reservoir area and measure methylmercury generated from those samples at Dr. Sunderland's Harvard University research lab. Dr. Sunderland was copied on the final proposal from the Nunatsiavut Government and my officials were advised to contact her directly with any technical questions. A budget prepared by Harvard officials was subsequently submitted associated with this proposed sampling.

However, on October 19, 2016, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation quoted Mr. Paul

Karoff, Assistant Dean for Communications, as having said "*That's not the sort of work that Prof. Sunderland does or would do*". We are totally perplexed by Mr. Karoff's statement. Despite Dr. Sunderland having provided advice to the Nunatsiavut Government about our methylmercury monitoring plan, suggested her own approach and provided a proposal through the Nunatsiavut Government which we subsequently agreed to fund, Harvard University has now publicly denied that Dr. Sunderland does or would do this sort of work.

At present, there is widespread opposition to the project, and insistence by the Nunatsiavut Government and others that soil must be removed from the entire reservoir so that the people consuming foods harvested downstream are not "poisoned". Civil unrest, hunger strikes, and widespread demonstrations have ensued. Harvard University, specifically Dr. Sunderland's methylmercury research, is being cited by the Nunatsiavut Government and others who oppose this project to justify their concerns and opposition.

Given the use of Dr. Sunderland's research in the noted public debate, and the public statements from Harvard University regarding her work in the area of methylmercury monitoring, I ask that you immediately address two matters of importance. (1) Please clarify the scope of Dr. Sunderland's work in the area of methylmercury monitoring, an activity which Mr. Karoff claims she does not, and would not, do. (2) Please indicate whether Harvard University endorses Dr. Sunderland's methylmercury research and its relationship to our ongoing hydro-electric project.

Sincerely,



**PERRY TRIMPER, MHA**  
District of Lake Melville  
Minister

Cc Honourable Dwight Ball, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador

Mr. Paul Karoff, Assistant Dean for Communications  
[karoff@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:karoff@seas.harvard.edu)