

LOCAL

City can't afford reef cleanup: MPP

BY ERIC MCGUINNESS

MPP Andrea Horwath argues taxpayers in Hamilton and Burlington shouldn't have to pay to clean up coal-tar contamination on Randle Reef in Hamilton Harbour.

The New Democrat representing Hamilton Centre believes the costs should be split between Canada and Ontario, as with the Sydney, N.S., tar ponds where a \$400-million containment project will be financed by the federal and provincial governments.

Officials say the reef in Hamilton Harbour is the second-worst case of coal-tar contamination in Canada, after the Sydney ponds. Steelmaking, coke production in particular, is blamed in both places, though it's suggested some of the Hamilton tar might have come from a coal gas plant long ago.

John Shaw of Environment Canada is proposing Canada and Ontario contribute \$30 million each toward the estimated \$90-million cost of dealing with the contaminated sediment in Hamilton Harbour, leaving \$30 million to come from municipal governments, the Hamilton Port Authority, industry and other local sources.

But Horwath says Hamilton is already hard-pressed to fund renewal of aging sewer and water infrastructure and can't afford to put millions into fixing historic industrial pollution of the bay. And she thinks local industry

should be putting its capital into controlling present and future water and air emissions. "This is a historical problem and let's face it, our city contributed to the growth of Canada.

"These kinds of huge environmental cleanup projects are best handled by senior levels of government, which have the fiscal capacity to deal with them. The capital costs should be funded by higher orders of government. And I'd rather have Stelco and Dofasco investing in current pollution abatement to reduce their impact on the environment."

The Nova Scotia government is pledging \$120 million toward the Sydney cleanup, with the rest to come from the federal government. With a similar 30-70 split, Ontario would have to come up with \$27 million for Randle Reef and Ottawa \$63 million.

Horwath says, "I'm calling on the McGuinty government to acknowledge its responsibility for the environment and start moving on rehabilitating Randle Reef. Ontario should press Ottawa to become a joint partner in the effort.

"The hard working people of Hamilton can't afford to cover these costs, nor should they be expected to. A major environmental cleanup should be financed by provincial and federal revenues, not the fragile municipal property tax base."

emcguinness@thespec.com
905-526-4650