

N.S. aims to bar key industries from trade deal

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Sectors would be excluded from agreement with Europe

OTTAWA — Nova Scotia is trying to protect its liquor monopoly and its mining, forestry and fishing and gambling industries from a new free trade agreement between Canada and Europe.

Ottawa asked all provinces to list the areas they want excluded from the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement being negotiated between the Harper government and the European Union.

The deal is believed to be nearing completion and would likely require towns and cities across Canada to open up bidding to foreign companies on their biggest spending items.

Provincial government staff refused to provide Nova Scotia's list of proposed exclusions, claiming the document is confidential because negotiations are still underway.

But a series of leaked documents the Quebec Network on Continental Integration made public show that Nova Scotia is pushing to exclude many of its main industries from unfettered European competition.

The 24 Nova Scotia objections that Canada submitted to the EU bargaining team include preserving the Nova Scotia Liquor Corp.'s control of market access for booze. The objections would also allow the liquor corporation to give preferential treatment to Nova Scotia citizens, investors and service providers.

Under Nova Scotia's proposals, the province would be able to limit foreign market access when it comes to food, fisheries and forestry products, pipelines, electricity and gambling.

The province also wants preferential treatment in the fields of mining, quarrying, oil wells, oil and gas activities, logging and agriculture.

Nova Scotia's list of demands was among hundreds of proposed exclusions the provinces sent to the EU as part of Canada's first offer in the negotiations. It is not clear how many will make it into the final deal.

The Council of Canadians and Canadian Union of Public Employees have criticized Canada's position and have questioned why this country asked for exemptions for gambling but not drinking water and waste-water systems.

"The major concerns we see are the commercialization of water and the public water systems," said CUPE spokesman Gregory Taylor.

Many of Canada's demands are designed to ensure local people provide local services.

Under Nova Scotia's objections, a person would have to be a provincial resident and member of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society to be a lawyer here. One would need to be a Nova Scotia resident to be authorized to perform marriages or be a Canadian resident to be a public accountant.

Fur harvesting and moose hunting licences would only be given to Nova Scotians, while limited liability partnerships would have to have an office in the province.

If Nova Scotia gets its way, the rules would help shelter the province's pulp industry from outside competition. But it is not clear whether the province sought protection for other industries, such as the Michelin tire plants, that

did not make it into Canada's opening offer to the EU.

The Chronicle Herald requested the proposed exemption lists that all provinces sent to Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. The Nova Scotia government rejected that request.

"Negotiations are still underway and, as a result, we cannot comment on anything concerning those negotiations," said Patricia Jreige, spokeswoman for the provincial Economic and Rural Development and Tourism Department.

The negotiations are said to be nearly completed and the proposed deal could come before Parliament within a month or two.