

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sept. 18, 2008

The Editor
Nanaimo Daily News

Re: 'Crisis in forest industry reflects sad reality' (Daily News, Sept. 17).

As someone who lives in the heart of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, it is simply untenable to claim the government's response has been "cosmetic."

The province has invested \$642 million and the federal government has committed \$1 billion to deal with the environmental and economic challenges posed by the epidemic. There are funds for economic diversification, for protecting public health, safety and infrastructure, for limiting the spread of the pest into new areas, and for restoring affected habitats and forests through reforestation.

And when it comes to the current state of the forest industry, no one is happy about the downturn in the U.S. economy and the difficulties it has caused. That's why through the \$129 million Community Development Trust the province is assisting workers and forestry dependent communities manage through the downturn. That's why the province supported local workers in their successful bid for the Harmac pulp mill.

Yes, the recovery will take time, and that's why we are working hard on developing new opportunities now. For example, we are pushing to expand the use of wood in commercial and institutional construction, and we are making progress in expanding our overseas export markets, particularly into China. This work is bearing fruit – B.C.'s lumber sales to China by volume have more than doubled since the Dream Home China project started in 2003. And, if current trends continue, sales to China could hit one billion board feet by the end of the year.

It's efforts like this – which we are conducting in partnership with forest stakeholders – that will make a difference for our forest families.

Sincerely,

Pat Bell
Minister of Forests and Range