



Photo: G. Gélinas

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MNA Lelièvre criticizes the lack of investment in tourism

Geneviève Gélinas

GASPÉ – Gaspé Member of the National Assembly Gaétan Lelièvre is accusing the Liberal government of abandoning tourism development in the region or, at least, of being too slow to support it.

The Parti québécois Member of the National Assembly fears that the Gaspé Peninsula could be left behind the rest of the province, leading to losses of jobs and spinoffs.

Several files are worrying Mr. Lelièvre. He says, the Quebec government is slow to make an announcement about the Percé boardwalk. The *Société des établissements de plein air du Québec* (SÉPAQ) is selling Fort-Prevel Inn and its golf course, after having “shamefully neglected it,” Mr. Lelièvre points out. In addition, the Amiral tourist train service is suspended because of the poor condition of the Haldimand railway bridge, which is the property of Transport Québec.

Exploramer of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts is at the centre of “a sad saga,” adds the MNA, because it didn’t obtain the \$200,000 usually given by Quebec to balance its budget. Mr. Lelièvre criticizes the abandonment of the \$10 million project to develop winter tourism in the Chic-Chocs. “Laurent Lessard (the minister responsible for Parks) told me that he doesn’t have the required credits for this project,” Mr. Lelièvre states.

“With the exception of the Geopark (under construction in Percé) that the Parti québécois announced when it was in power, what other projects are underway? When I look at the results (for tourism) of the Liberal government after 18 months, I don’t see anything. I just see files in jeopardy.”

Tourism development is also put at risk by transportation problems, Mr. Lelièvre adds. “The service reduction of Orléans Express, the train service interruption, the increase in the price of gas and plane tick-

ets, all of this should be addressed (to develop tourism).”

Even though the 2015 tourist season was good, the government has to look further, believes the MNA. “We cannot evaluate the industry health with only one season. If we look at a longer period, we can see that we’ve had several very quiet seasons.”

“The rest of Québec is developing tourism in a very aggressive way, says Mr. Lelièvre. If we don’t develop new products on the Gaspé Coast, we’ll become uncompetitive.”

“We will certainly have consequences of job losses and spinoff losses,” the MNA states.

The MNA puts forward several explanations to what he describes as a lack of investment in tourism. The region has no regional minister “coming from the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and committed to the region,” says Mr. Lelièvre.

The Minister responsible for the region is Jean-D’Amour, MNA of Rivière-

du-Loup—Témiscouata. Liberal representatives don’t know the regional issues well, Mr. Lelièvre says, and the government isn’t interested enough in non-urban areas. The MNA also points out “the blind across the board cuts asked by the Treasury Board to Quebec ministries.”

But the main reason, according to Mr. Lelièvre, is “the absence of a development vision, a plan for the region. The government works with improvised announcements.”

Mr. Lelièvre describes as “inconceivable” the fact that the Gaspé Coast finds itself in such a situation given its internationally recognized potential. Lonely Planet has recently ranked the famous Gaspésie Tour among their “five offbeat coastal trips” along with the Wild Atlantic Way in Ireland and Norway’s fjords and islands. The Peninsula has also been in several praiseful rankings published by the National Geographic Society over the last few years.