

**For Immediate Release:**

## What is Harper afraid of?



(TORONTO, ON – May 29, 2012 ) What is Stephen Harper afraid of? Rivers that turn black and run into the sea? Birds falling from the sky? People fleeing a toxic land?

Or maybe Harper is most afraid of this...Tar Sands Oil being labeled dirty.

Canadian artist and environmental author Franke James' illustrated essay, "*What is Harper afraid of?*" (<http://www.frankejames.com/afraid/>) has struck a chord with Canadians. It is inspiring people across Canada to write to their MPs to complain about the changes to environmental protection in the omnibus Budget Bill C-38.

Franke James' illustrated essay features her [recorded] interview with the Minister of Natural Resources, Joe Oliver. She challenges the Harper Government's claims that they are doing "responsible resource development".

Two of Minister Oliver's quotes which appear in the essay:

On risks to B.C.'s coast from a tanker spill: "*I'm not a scientist, so that's why we're getting an independent evaluation.*"

On a "secret" Environment Canada report on Oil Sands pollution in the Athabasca: "*It's secret to me too.*"

In a form letter to MPs James writes, "Surprisingly, Minister Joe Oliver – the man who has travelled across Canada pitching the need to speed up Environmental Reviews – said he'd never seen the secret government report and didn't know whether the fish from the Athabasca River were safe to eat. (When pressed, Oliver admitted that he had heard about deformed and contaminated fish in the news.)"

James continues, "Shouldn't the Federal Minister in charge of the oil sands be held accountable for oil sands mining that is polluting our air, land and water? Does this mean that poisoning downstream communities and wildlife, is

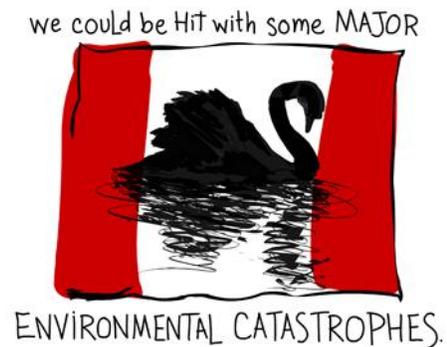
just the 'cost of doing business' in Canada? Why is the government looking the other way? Is this 'environmental racism' as the First Nations contend? "

"The government and the oil industry need to be held accountable for the pollution from oil sands mining. Canadian taxpayers and oil sands investors are at risk of class action lawsuits if we look the other way."

Against the backdrop of an illustrated Canadian flag, James writes, "With all the changes that Harper is making we could be hit with some major environmental catastrophes."

The flag's maple leaf is replaced with a black swan.

The illustrated essay ends with a call-to-action for people to send letters to their local MPs urging them, "Don't look the other way! Please vote 'against' the Budget Bill-C38." Since the essay launched on Friday night, about 2,000 letters from constituents have been sent to MPs, including Stephen Harper, Joe Oliver, Peter Kent, Keith Ashfield, John Baird, Peter Van Loan, John Duncan, Bev Oda, Vic Toews, David Wilks, as well as MPs from the NDP, Liberal and Green parties.



"Pictures speak a thousand words, and this fantastic illustrated essay speaks volumes about the current government's reckless attitude towards our shared environment," says Hannah McKinnon of Climate Action Network Canada. "Canadians deserve a government that shares their values for a healthy and safe future - it is high time for Prime Minister Harper to start acting on behalf of people instead of big oil."

"*What is Harper Afraid Of?* is terrific. Very well done, very passionate and smart. Thank you."  
Graeme Gibson, Author, Environmentalist

"It is great! Some welcome gallows humor in the *Through the Looking Glass World* that is Harperland!"  
Dr. David Schindler, Killam Memorial Chair, ecology professor, University of Alberta

Illustrations by James are often combined with evocative photographs, including Great Bear Rainforest photos by Ian McAllister of Pacific Wild, and Alberta oil sands photos by Pembina Institute. The essay features a "secret" Environment Canada presentation obtained by Postmedia News through Access-to-Information laws.

The illustrated essay (and the Oliver transcript) are available at: <http://www.frankejames.com/afraid/>

The animated video "*What is Harper afraid of?*" is being screened at The Elora Centre for the Arts until July 8th: 'Perspectives on Canadian Tar Sands and the Northern Gateway Pipeline'. The video will be released on the web in June.

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For the latest updates, follow Franke on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/frankejames>

*Franke James is an award-winning artist whose illustrated essays on environmental and social issues have been reviewed and showcased around the world. In November 2011, James' art show "Banned on the Hill" appeared in Ottawa, around the corner from Parliament Hill. The crowd-funded billboard show protested the silencing of environmental voices by the Harper Government. James is the author of the illustrated book, Bothered by My Green Conscience, and a member of the Writers Union of Canada, PEN Canada and CARFAC. She has a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Victoria and lives in Toronto. For more information see: <http://www.frankejames.com>*