



Friends of the Earth
Les Ami(e)s de la Terre

Media Release

Reporting disease in fish a crime? Proposed British Columbia law condemned by Friends of the Earth Canada

New legislation to muzzle journalists and scientists may have serious implications for food health and safety and freedom of speech

(Ottawa, May 30, 2012) With the anticipated passage of Bill 37 – *2012 Animal Health Act* tomorrow, British Columbia Minister of Agriculture Don McRae will be responsible for new and punitive legislation with heavy fines and imprisonment for people reporting diseased animals and fish. One provision of the pending legislation would make it illegal for journalists or scientists to report on animal illnesses at fish farms or other agricultural operations.

This comes as the embattled British Columbia open net-pen fish farms face repeated culls after disease and virus outbreaks. The industry itself reports that in at least one instance these culled fish (which have grown to market size) could be on their way to grocery stores.

Beatrice Olivastri, CEO of Friends of the Earth Canada, observed, “There’s a war on fish across Canada. In Ottawa, Prime Minister Harper is gutting the *Fisheries Act* and its important protection and conservation attributes in order to fast track megaprojects. In the East, fish farm salmon are being culled due to a salmon influenza. In the West, now reporting disease in fish will be punished to protect industry profits.”

BC’s Information and Privacy Commissioner, Elizabeth Denham makes critical points on the proposed Bill 37 (see correspondence to Minister McRae).

Olivastri continued, “Premier Clark of British Columbia needs to take steps to build consumer confidence in farmed fish rather than setting up legal hidey-holes for diseased fish owners.

FOE Canada would counsel sober second thought to BC politicians – don’t forsake health and safety and freedom of speech for industry profits.

Olivastri concluded, “I suggest Minister McRae, in the interest of accuracy and transparency, change the name of Bill 37 from the *Animal Health Act* to the *Act to Muzzle Alexandra Morton and British Columbia Citizens Concerned about Wild Salmon*.”

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For more information, or to schedule interviews, please contact:

Beatrice Olivastri, Chief Executive Officer, Friends of the Earth Canada 613 241-0085x26 (cell) 613 724-8690

Copy of letter from Elizabeth Denham, Information and Privacy Commissioner to Minister McRae:

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/pdfs/public/MinisterMcRaeLetter_Bill37%283May2012%29.pdf

Friends of the Earth Canada is the Canadian member of Friends of the Earth International, the world’s largest grassroots environmental network campaigning on today’s most urgent environmental and social issues.