

NEWS RELEASE

Canadian scientists implore federal government to protect Fisheries Act

625 scientists call on Prime Minister Harper not to prioritize industry growth over habitat and species protection

For immediate release

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VANCOUVER – Canada's most senior ecologists and aquatic scientists are among those calling on the federal government to abandon plans to remove habitat protections from the Fisheries Act.

In a letter sent today to Prime Minister Stephen Harper as well as the minister of fisheries and oceans, 625 scientists (including 18 Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada, and more than 30 holders of Endowed Research Chairs,) urged the government not to make changes to the act in favour of large industrial projects.

“All species, including humans, require functioning ecosystems based on healthy habitats,” said David Schindler, the lead author of the letter and the Killam Memorial Professor of Ecology, University of Alberta. “It is the explicit role of government to find the balance between protecting this habitat and encouraging sustainable economic growth – not to pit them against one another.”

The letter advises that industrial activities already pose significant risks to fish habitat and many aquatic species at risk, and that the government should “therefore be strengthening, not weakening the habitat protection provisions of the Fisheries Act (and other environmental laws, including the Species at Risk Act and the Migratory Birds Convention Act), in order to protect our dwindling fisheries and species at risk.”

It goes on to warn the federal government that weakening habitat protections will make Canada look irresponsible internationally, and changes to environmental law should not be done without expert scientific advice from Canada’s environmental science community.

The scientists’ letter was sent after an internal government document leaked last week suggested the government plans to make significant changes to the Fisheries Act, and specifically to its habitat protection provisions. Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield issued a statement saying his department is reviewing fish and fish habitat protection policies, but that no decisions have been made.

Today's letter represents the second group of prominent scientists to publically express concerns over the rumoured changes, adding to a growing wave of discontent with the likely legislative rollbacks in the environmental arena. On Monday, the President of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution, an organization of more than 1,000 ecologists and evolutionary biologists across Canada, announced he had sent a letter to the federal government opposing possible changes to the Fisheries Act..

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