

Conservation groups demand withdrawal of Bill C-45: Proposed legislation is flawed, short of expectations

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For Immediate release

VANCOUVER – Conservation groups across Canada are calling on the Conservative government to withdraw a proposed new Fisheries Act for Canada, Bill C-45, from further discussion in Parliament. The groups say that the proposed Bill is flawed and fails to adequately mandate protection for Canada's marine and freshwater environments or for environmental protection in general.

"This proposed Bill falls far short of our expectations," says Bill Wareham, Acting Director for the David Suzuki Foundation's Marine Conservation Program. "Our review of the Bill found significant short-comings. The Bill lacks language that requires the Minister of Fisheries to protect Canada's fish and fish habitat."

Bill C-45 was introduced to Parliament by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans in early December 2006. Although the current Fisheries Act is outdated and needs to be modernized, the conservation groups say this Bill has major failings that must be addressed before the Bill proceeds any further through Parliament. The groups also claim that Bill C-45 was developed without the kind of meaningful public consultation necessary for changing such an important piece of Canadian legislation.

"Bill C-45 does not compel the Minister to make conservation of fish and their habitat a priority, only that it be taken into consideration in making decisions," says Catherine Stewart, Campaign Director for the Living Oceans Society. "Any new legislation concerning the management and protection of Canada's fish stocks should be far more forward thinking. This proposed Bill is a 19th century vision for the 21st century."

"If this Bill passes in its current form Canadians will be losing a huge opportunity to secure a better future of our ocean and freshwater fish and fish habitats, and the communities that rely on them," says Susanna Fuller, Marine Conservation Coordinator for the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax.

Martha Kostuch, Vice President for Alberta's Friends of the Old Man River, says the Bill was developed without proper consultation with the public and stakeholders. "None of the conservation groups working on fish issues in Canada were consulted in any meaningful way on this Bill and that concerns us," says Kostuch. "If the Minister is serious about amending and updating the old Act, we feel that he should first consult with the people that will be the most affected -- that has not happened."

"Our groups are asking that the Bill be taken back to the people of Canada for comprehensive consultation and further development before it proceeds through the Parliamentary process," says Stephen Hazell, Executive Director for the Sierra Club of Canada.

A list of coalition members opposing the Bill is attached.

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