



January 16, 2012

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Via Email Re: Attacks on NGP opponents

Dear Prime Minister,

BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) is an intervenor in the National Energy Board hearings into the Northern Gateway Pipeline. We are astounded by the recent attacks by yourself and your Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Joe Oliver, on environmental groups who receive funding from American charities, alleging, among other things, that they are opposed to all development, thereby hurting working families, and that their funding “without exaggeration” comes from American billionaire socialists who call the shots. Coming from the top levels of government, not only is this intimidating, but these unsubstantiated charges, and your stated intention of reviewing the charitable status of environmental groups who receive foreign funding, appear very much like an attempt to stifle dissent in Canada. Furthermore, we consider it most inappropriate for the federal government to interfere in a legally constituted public review of a proposed industrial project. These reviews are designed to hear public opinion and public knowledge to facilitate ultimate decisions that are sound and in the public interest. They are not intended to be tiresome formalities to be got out of the way as quickly as possible. With respect, the statements made by yourself and Mr. Oliver constitute a deeply disturbing undermining of democracy.

BC Nature is a volunteer-run federation of natural history clubs in BC, with a membership of close to 5,000. Our mandate is to promote appreciation and understanding of the natural world, and to conserve it. We do not receive funding from foreign sources, but stand up for fellow conservation and environmental organizations who do receive such funding as they have every right to apply for it. Running an organization such as ours, with only one office manager and otherwise relying entirely on volunteers, places a tremendously heavy burden of time on those volunteers. For this reason, most environmental organizations are now largely staff-run, which of course necessitates finding outside funding sources. If you are concerned about participants in the Northern Gateway Pipeline hearings receiving funding from sources outside of Canada, should you not also consider the vastly greater sums that Enbridge receives from foreign sources to assist it secure approval of its application to develop its Northern Gateway Pipeline and tanker port project? It is strangely inconsistent to attack the one and condone the other.

BC Nature is not anxious to prolong unduly the Northern Gateway Pipeline hearings because of the huge time commitment involved, and we doubt that any other environmental intervenor wishes to do so either.

At the same time, we also strongly oppose rushing the hearings if this means cutting short the time needed to do a thorough assessment of the project. As a conservation organization, our interest lies in having a rigorous review of the impacts the project will have, or could have on terrestrial and marine species and the ecosystems that sustain them. Ecosystems are complex and the interrelationships of organisms frequently not well understood, so that major developments may have disastrous unforeseen consequences if their potential effects are not studied and fully understood.

We humans are a component of the biosphere and are ultimately dependent on it. BC Nature members, and our colleagues in other environmental organizations and in the scientific community, understand the importance for human wellbeing of maintaining the health of the biosphere. From our review of the project Application to date, the proponent's assessment is superficial and inadequate, and much more work is required to provide the Joint Review Panel with the information needed to make an informed decision. From the evidence of other intervenors on the National Energy Board public registry for the Northern Gateway project, many other reviewers have also found significant deficiencies in the Application that need to be addressed.

I believe a number of BC Nature members are among those who have registered for the Oral Community Hearings - not with the intention of dragging out the hearings, but because they care about the wildlife and ecosystems, and the people they sustain along the pipeline route and along the coast, put at risk by the pipeline and tanker traffic. These people are knowledgeable on many different aspects of the natural world and it is important that members of the Joint Review Panel and government decision-makers attend to what each and everyone says. Indeed they need to hear what all those British Columbians who have registered to speak have to say, because they doubtless know and understand the BC coast and pipeline route better than the Joint Review Panel members, none of whom come from British Columbia.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Regards,



John Neville, President
BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists)

cc The Hon Joe Oliver, Minister of Natural Resources - Joe.Oliver@parl.gc.ca
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