Dear Susan Jones:

Thank you for your letter of May 14, 1999 to the Premier of British Columbia which has been forwarded to British Columbia Assets and Land Corporation (BCAL) for response. I would like to begin by apologize for any offense that may have been taken to my letter of April 30, 1999. Please understand that no offense was intended.

Perhaps the best way for me to respond to your concerns at this time is to clearly outline the actions BCAL has taken to date as the agent of the government with respect to the sale of certain farm lands in the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay area.

On January 20, 1999, the Minister of Agriculture and Food announced in the legislature and in a press release the government's intention to sell approximately 2,600 acres of Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay land. The British Columbia Assets and Land Corporation was asked to manage the sale of the land on behalf of the government.

The land was offered for sale to the lessees of the land for continued use as agricultural land. The farmland properties for sale are restricted to use as farmland by a covenant consistent with the Agricultural Land Commission provisions and the zoning designation is part of the Agricultural Land Reserve. A five-year moratorium on the re-sale of the land is a condition of the proposed sale to prevent speculatory land deals. In addition, all wildlife protection and enhancement measures that currently apply to land in the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay areas will continue to apply to the land being offered for sale.

None of the land in the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay area being offered for sale by the Government of British Columbia is currently on the Greenbelt Register. That being said, it is understood that some 200 acres of this land was purchased through the Greenbelt Protection Act Fund in 1973. However, this land was never established as Greenbelt Reserve Land by Order-in-Council, therefore it does not currently appear on the Greenbelt Register.
The challenge for government concerning the future of the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay area is to balance the various agricultural and wildlife interests in the area and adhere to all applicable public policies concerning this land. At present, the issue centres around ownership and future use of the land. Should the government of British Columbia continue to own the land and lease it to farmers or should the farmers be able to own and manage their property and business? Will the sale of the proposed farmlands to farmers for continued agricultural use disrupt the wildlife use of the land?

The government believes that the sale of the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay land will not substantially affect the existing use of the land. The land will continue to be used for both agricultural and wildlife purposes as it has been under government ownership since 1973. This understanding is based on the fact that a number of covenants have been placed on the sale of the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay farm lands including restrictions on land use to agricultural purposes and restrictions on the re-sale of the land. It is also based on the understanding that all wildlife protection and enhancement measures will continue to apply to the land being offered for sale including the Agricultural Land Development Act, the Code of Agricultural Practice for Waste Management, the Canada-B.C. Green Plan for Agriculture, the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program, the Alaksen Management Plan, and the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust.

I will now address each of the points of concern raised in your letter.

Government Interest in Crown Land in the Boundary Bay Area:: The government’s interest in the Crown-owned farm land in the Boundary Bay area is perhaps best demonstrated through the government’s actions with respect to the land. The government understands that approximately 200 acres of the Boundary Bay area farmland were purchased under the Green Belt Protection Fund. The government further understands that in accordance with the Green Belt Protection Act a variety of land use options, including use as farmland, were and are available to the government. Government has consistently elected to use this land for farmland since 1973. Government has also taken a number of measures to support the wildlife use of the land as noted above. As stated in my earlier letter to you, BCAL is not rushing to market with either of these two properties and we are involved in ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks regarding these two properties.

B.C.’s Global Commitments to Wildlife Protection: The government of British Columbia and BCAL as the agent of government in this case, are aware of the global commitments made by the province to protect wildlife habitat. To that end, the province of British Columbia has preserved more than 50,000 hectares of private and public land along the coast of B.C. through the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program, established in 1987.

Government Sale of Boundary Bay Area Farm Land: I believe I have addressed the issue of why the Government decided to sell certain Boundary Bay area farmlands earlier in this letter. Please reference paragraphs seven and eight.
Covenants on Sale of Boundary Bay Farm Land: As stated earlier in this letter (paragraphs 5 and 8) there are a number of covenants on the sale of the Boundary Bay area farm land. These covenant are consistent with Agricultural Land Commission provisions restricting use to agriculture. In addition, all wildlife protection and enhancement measures that currently apply to land in the Roberts Bank/Boundary Bay areas will continue to apply to the land being offered for sale. Therefore the government believes that the manner of the sale balances the agricultural wildlife interests in the area.

Moratorium on the Sale of Crown land in the Boundary Bay Area: The government is not willing to place a moratorium on the sale of Boundary Bay area farmland. However, with respect to the properties commonly known as the Hanson and Embree properties, BCAL is not rushing to market with either of these two properties and we are involved in ongoing discussions concerning the future of these properties with the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks.

Remove Boundary Bay Area Properties from Control of BCAL: The properties in question are Crown-owned properties which the government of British Columbia has decided to sell, with the possible exceptions noted above. BCAL is the agency of government responsible for the disposition of Crown assets and will discharge its responsibility in this matter at the request of government.

Legislate Protection of Boundary Bay and Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands in Perpetuity: The government intends to proceed with the sale of the Boundary Bay area farm land and is satisfied that the existing covenants on the sale are sufficient to ensure a balanced agricultural wildlife use of the land.

Restrict Sale of Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands to Original Owners: Your request to restrict the sale of these lands to original owners is inconsistent with your request for a moratorium on the sale of the land. However, I will explain that government’s public policy goal at this time with respect to the Boundary Bay area farmland is to keep the land in agricultural use. To that end, the land was initially offered for sale to the existing lessees. When the land was purchased by the government in 1973, the original owners had the option of continuing to farm the land by lease from the government. Some of the owners elected to take this option and some did not. Where the original owners elected not to lease the land for agricultural use, the government leased the land to other farmers and in this way ensured agricultural use of the land. Therefore, the government is proceeding with the sale of these lands to people for agricultural purposes. Existing lessees have the right of first refusal.
Thank you for taking the time to express your views and concerns.

Yours sincerely,

R. Lorne Seitz
President and Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Honourable Dan Miller
    Premier

    Honourable Gordon F. D. Wilson
    Minister of Finance and Corporate Relations

    Honourable Joan Sawicki
    Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks

    Honourable Corky Evans
    Minister of Agriculture and Food