May 10, 2019

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Dear Senators,

Re: Support for Bill C-48, the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act

BC Nature (the Federation of BC Naturalists) represents more than 50 naturalists’ clubs and more than 6,000 members province-wide. Our membership consists of dedicated naturalists and scientists who are connected to and have expertise in British Columbia’s landscapes and the diversity of organisms that inhabit them. We write in concert with other concerned groups to ask you to support Bill C-48, the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act, and to seek your commitment to speak in support of the Bill at third reading in the Senate.

Bill C-48 seeks to protect a biologically and resource rich region in northern British Columbia – Queen Charlotte Sound, Hecate Strait and Dixon Entrance from large tankers carrying crude and persistent oil. Crude oil tankers have never plied north coast waters, despite repeated proposals in the region over the past five decades for tankers to import crude oil from international destinations, to export crude oil from the oil sands, or indeed to develop offshore petroleum reserves in the north coast itself. Indigenous nations and communities in the region, supported by many British Columbians and Canadians, have emphasized again and again that there is too much at stake in the north coast to expose to the risk of a large oil spill.
The north coast ecosystem is a global ecological treasure. Its marine waters and estuaries are inseparably interconnected with the Great Bear Rainforest, the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest left on earth. The well-being of human communities in the region is integrally tied to ensuring a pristine north coast marine ecosystem. Ocean-based businesses on the north coast (such as commercial fisheries and tourism) generate $1.2 billion each year and are responsible for the employment of 30 percent of the regional population in the north coast. According to the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre, these economic activities would be seriously impacted by the ecological devastation of a large oil spill.

Canada’s investment in the Great Bear Rainforest has to date yielded direct investment of $286 M, created 100+ new businesses and permanent jobs and yielded $85M in tax revenues—a return of 950 percent on the initial $30 million investment. It has proven possible to generate employment and truly sustainable prosperity in the region without resorting to oil ports and exports.

The north coast is home to over 400 species of fish, including salmon. It is also home to over 25 species of whales, dolphins, porpoises and pinnipeds, and supports 95 percent of breeding seabird populations in British Columbia. North coast waters are the only known location in the entire world for 9,000 year-old ancient sponge reefs. Scientists from Fisheries and Oceans Canada have identified almost half of the north coast’s marine waters as special “Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas” using criteria drawn from the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The area covered by the Bill’s moratorium is inherently more dangerous than coastal waters elsewhere in Canada: sudden and violent storms create confused sea states with high waves at short intervals—all of which is extremely dangerous to large vessels. The weather would prevent effective spill response up to 98 percent of the time in winter, and 65 percent of the time in summer, based on wave height alone. The region has seen many wrecks of smaller vessels and groundings are a common occurrence. This is not a place that can be made safe for oil tanker traffic.

For half a century north coast residents and supporters have adamantly maintained that the unique north coast ecosystem, and the livelihoods, culture and way of life it supports, must be fully and permanently protected from the risks posed by oil tankers. We respectfully ask for your help to heed these calls by speaking to support the passage of Bill C-48, without amendments that would weaken the Bill, during third reading debate in the Senate.

Yours truly,

Cornelis (Kees) Visser, Ph.D., P. Geol.
President, BC Nature