



ASSOCIATION OF
PROFESSIONAL BIOLOGY
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July 30, 2018

Environmental Assessment Revitalization Public Comment Process
c/o BC Environmental Assessment Office
836 Yates St, Victoria, BC V8W 1L8

By online submission

Dear Review Panel,

RE: Province of BC Discussion Paper on Environmental Assessment Revitalization

The Association of Professional Biology (APB) appreciates the opportunity to provide you with feedback through the current Public Engagement process on the Province of British Columbia's proposed Environmental Assessment (EA) Revitalization.

The APB represents over 500 biology professionals in British Columbia. Our membership is comprised of knowledgeable, experienced and accredited scientists who, through the College of Applied Biology Act (2002), have formally stipulated professional accountability for stewardship of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and biological resources, within a framework made up of Registered Biology Professionals.

Biology professionals play an integral role in all aspects of environmental assessment and regulatory review processes. Many of our members serve as EA practitioners in capacities such as implementing policy and regulatory processes in the public sector; advising on project design and impact mitigation options in the private sector; and providing objective research, monitoring, audits, and expert testimony as independent professionals working in the public interest.

We have reviewed both the EA Revitalization Discussion Paper and the EA Advisory Committee report. The Committee's thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations provide an excellent starting point for discussion of EA Revitalization. In principle, the suggested approaches are moving in the right

direction to improve clarity and transparency in EA reviews while advancing mandated reconciliation and public interest objectives. We provide the following comments for your consideration.

First, we endorse the Province's commitment to advancing reconciliation in BC through formal recognition and implementation in BC's EA legislation. The EA Advisory Committee's recommended approach and emphasis on ensuring that reviews are consensus-driven and evidence-based, with decision rationales documented as part of the public record, are positive proposals toward developing clear mechanisms for joint administration of environmental assessments. We encourage the Province to make a concerted effort to educate the public on why and how reconciliation objectives are being integrated into EA and the nature of decision-making authority in joint administration processes, as expressed by the EA Advisory Committee. This should include clarity about the interpretation of consent versus veto powers. Further, rescind discretionary decision-making powers, which Ministers currently have, that undermine objective transparency and confidence in EA reviews.

Second, we support a shift toward more integrated, holistic, and balanced approaches to EA reviews. A purpose statement in EA legislation should include formal recognition that applying precautionary principles to protecting the environment, ecosystem integrity, and health of communities is the fundamental objective of EA. This can be supported by an integrated approach to evaluating projects across the 5 pillars of sustainability (environmental, economic, social, cultural, and health), as suggested in the Discussion Paper. Explicitly defining and weighing both positive and negative outcomes of proposed developments on each of these pillars would enhance transparency and promote more balanced discussion of varied perspectives in project reviews.

We are particularly pleased to see significant discussion on addressing cumulative impacts in a meaningful way. Revising the Reviewable Projects Regulation is a key stepping stone toward improved confidence in the integrity of EA processes and the ability to effectively assess and manage cumulative impacts. Reviewing projects through the lens of overarching policies (e.g., provincial Cumulative Effects Framework, BC's Climate Plan, etc.) and proposed regional assessments and strategic plans is a promising approach to enable consideration of cumulative impacts across proposed and existing projects. Specifying legislated decision criteria that require consideration of sustainable development objectives (e.g., consistency with BC's climate targets and strategies) is positive. The proposed changes also appear to align with the current federal environmental assessment review, enabling better coordination for assessments subject to multiple levels of regulatory review.

Key objectives must include revising the current Reviewable Projects Regulation to introduce broader criteria and thresholds for designation of reviewable projects, in a way that supports comprehensive assessment of cumulative impacts regionally and provincially. Explicitly defining criteria and thresholds that reasonably balance considerations across the 5 pillars of sustainability and form the basis of legislated decision criteria in EA reviews will also need to be addressed.

Third, we are strong proponents of evidence-based decision making founded on open access to information and acceptable validation of information sources. Recognizing the need to integrate and balance both scientific and Indigenous knowledge in project assessments, we encourage the

development of explicit and mutually-acceptable agreements on how scientific and Indigenous information are considered, verified and validated in EA reviews. Increasing opportunities and necessary funding support for independent analyses and verification of information, as needed, is also encouraged to support public trust and confidence in EA reviews.

We support the recommendations that all EA-related information be archived in permanent and publicly-accessible information repositories, with limited provisions for protection of sensitive information when warranted, to enable continuing review of the effectiveness of EA outcomes across the five pillars. A growing record of information, analysis, best practices, and conclusions would provide a foundation for knowledge building and continuous improvement of EA processes.

Moving forward, **the APB would like to be recognized as a key stakeholder in environmental assessment processes, and be invited to participate in Direct Engagement** as proposed changes to EA legislation are further developed. The APB can play a key role in policy review and development by bringing an objective, knowledgeable, and practice-based perspective to further the discussion. The APB is also active in working groups which inform overarching policies and strategies relevant to environmental assessment, such as the Professional Association Climate Change Adaptation Working Group.

Finally, given the broad scope of policy reviews currently underway to renew BC's Land Use Planning, Rural Development, Species at Risk Act, Climate Change, Professional Reliance, and Wildlife & Habitat Management policies and strategies, we urge the Province to initiate collaborative approaches amongst these review processes.

We look forward to sharing our perspectives and contributing further practical input as revitalization of BC's Environmental Assessment process moves toward revised legislation, and ultimately to implementation.

Sincerely,



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Association of Professional Biology

Mark Thompson
President, Association of Professional Biology

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