

ENVIRONMENT POLICY BRIEFING

OPINION FISH HABITAT

How Trudeau can pass the science test

By restoring the Fisheries Act to its full strength, the government can meet its own standard for scientific integrity.



DAVID SCHINDLER AND JOHN P. SMOL

A breath of fresh air spread across Canada's scientific community in the past several months. After years of tight government restrictions and deep funding cuts, many researchers welcomed our country's renewed commitment to scientific understanding. We have a new minister of science, and the Liberal party has vowed to use science as the foundation for public policy.

The Trudeau government will soon have a chance to honour that pledge. In the coming weeks, it will announce plans for reviewing a host of environmental protections that were weakened by the Conservatives. One of them is the Fisheries Act, and it will serve as a litmus test of the government's commitment to science.

By restoring the Fisheries Act to its full strength, the government can meet its own standard for scientific integrity.

Decades of research show that fish depend upon vibrant rivers, lakes, and ocean waters to thrive. Yet, in 2012, the Harper government removed habitat protection from the Fisheries Act. The revision shrank the scope of the law, covering only fish that were part of "a commercial, recreational, or aboriginal" fishery. Countless other species—and the habitats that support them—were left vulnerable to pollution and degradation.

Four former fisheries ministers, including two Conservatives and two Liberals, decried the changes. More than 600 scientists, including us, signed onto a letter reporting that habitat destruction was the leading cause of species decline. Weakening habitat protection, the scientists wrote, ran counter to fundamental principles that "all ecologists and fisheries scientists around the world agree on."

These principles are clear to anyone who has ever caught a fish on a riverbank or ocean shore. The surrounding water, streambed or marine environment affects the health of the fish: if it's contaminated or eroded, there are fewer fish. Likewise, any child who has learned about food chains in school can recognize that if we fail to protect minnows and small fish, then salmon and other commercially important species that eat them will falter as well.

Before the Harper government disregarded these facts, Canada was a leader in managing fish. The Fisheries Act is the nation's oldest piece of environmental legislation—almost as old as the confederation itself. In 1977, under prime minister Pierre Trudeau and fisheries minister Romeo LeBlanc, it was updated to protect fish habitat, because researchers showed that ecosystems play a central role in sustaining fish populations.



The Harper government removed habitat protection from the Fisheries Act. The revision shrank the scope of the law, covering only fish that were part of 'a commercial, recreational, or aboriginal' fishery. Flickr photo by David Keep

Now Canada can reassert our former leadership. We can regain lost ground and make progress on confronting new threats to fish. Climate change and invasive species, for instance, are putting even more pressure on fish populations and their habitat. The Trudeau government has vowed to address these challenges. It issued a mandate letter in November calling for a full review of Harper's amendments to the Fisheries Act and the inclusion of habitat protections and other modern safeguards.

The best way to deliver on this mandate—and pass the science test the party has set for itself—is to reinstate habitat protections right now. The government has taken similar steps to quickly and decisively repair damage done to other public policies. Now is the time to act on behalf of our fish and the ecosystems they need.

Canada is blessed with thousands of lakes and rivers, and the longest coastline in the world. We are fortunate to have these globally significant resources, and it is our responsibility to care for them wisely. We can be leaders again, ensuring our fish—and the cultures and economies they support—are managed for long-term health. That leadership starts with the Trudeau government honouring its commitment to science.

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THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY, JUNE 13

- The Senate National Security and Defence Committee will meet at 11 a.m. in Room 2, Victoria Building to study issues related to the Defence Policy Review presently being undertaken by the government. It will hear from former defence ministers Peter MacKay and David Pratt. It will then pick back up its study on Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the PSLREB Act and will hear from former senior adviser to executive committee of RCMP A. Edward Aust; Ottawa Police Services Board Chair Councillor Eli El-Chantiry; and Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner Bob Paulson.
- The House Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. in Room 8-53, 131 Queen St. to study the Next Agricultural Policy Framework and will hear from the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food strategic policy branch's assistant deputy minister Greg Meredith, and Andrew Goldstein, director general of policy, planning and integration directorate.
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will meet at 5 p.m. in Toronto in the Chelsea Hotel to hear audience remarks on service delivery to veterans.

TUESDAY, JUNE 14

- The House Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics Committee will meet at 8:45 a.m. in Room 268, The Valour Building. The first portion of the meeting will be in-camera to deal with a draft report on its study of the Access to Information Act. Then, on its study of the Privacy Act, the committee will hear from the Canada Research Chair in Information Law Teresa Scassa; Queen's University professor David Lyon; and Lisa Austin, associate professor at the David Asper Centre for Constitutional Rights at the University of Toronto.
- The House Canadian Heritage Committee will meet at 8:45 a.m. in Room 7-52, 131 Queen St. to study the state of Canadian museums. It will hear from the Canadian Museums Association's Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer John McAvery and Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire de Montréal's Manon Blanchette.
- The House International Trade Committee will meet at 8:45 a.m. in Room 306, The Valour Building to continue its Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) public consultation. It will hear from Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University Pamela Palmater; the AFN's British Columbia regional chief Shane Gottfriedson and his chief of staff Melanie Debassige; the Métis National Council's chief of staff John Weinstein and bilateral coordinator Marc LeClair. It will then go in-camera to discuss its draft report on the Softwood Lumber Agreement.
- The House Citizenship and Immigration Committee will meet at 8:45 a.m. in Room 306, The Valour Building to study the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees to Canada. It will hear from Imadeddin Sawaf and Eman Allhalaq as individuals; as well as representatives from the Calgary Board of Education and the Peel District School Board.
- The House Government Operations and Estimates Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. in Room 8-53, 131 Queen St. to discuss changes to the government estimates process. It will hear from Department of Finance and Treasury Board Secretariat of Ontario officials.
- The House Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. in Room 228, The Valour Building to study Suicide Among Indigenous Peoples and Communities. It will hear from consultant psychiatrist Dr. Cornelia Wieman via videoconference in Toronto.
- The Senate Aboriginal Peoples Committee will meet at 9 a.m. in Room 160-S, Centre Block to study best practices and on-going challenges relating to housing in the North. It will hear from Nunatsiavut Government officials; and officials from the Tornagat Regional Housing Association.
- The Senate Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament Committee will meet at 9:30 a.m. in Room 356-S, Centre Block to continue studying the case of privilege relating to the leaks of the auditor general's report on the audit of the Senate. It will hear from Senator Serge Joyal.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15

- The House will debate Liberal MP Mauril Bélanger's (Ottawa—Vanier, Ont.) act to amend the National Anthem Act. This is the third

reading of Bill C-210.

- There will also be debate on Conservative MP Ziad Aboultaif's (Edmonton Manning, Alta.) Canadian Organ Donor Registry Act. This is the second reading of Bill C-223.
- In private members' business, the House will resume debate on Conservative MP Pat Kelly's (Calgary Rocky Ridge, Alta.) motion (M-43) on a Taxpayer Bill of Rights.
- The House Official Languages Committee will have a televised meeting at 3:30 p.m. in Room 253-D, Centre Block to receive a briefing from Air Canada officials on the Special Report to Parliament on Air Canada.
- The Senate Human Rights Committee will meet at 11:30 p.m. in Room 9, Victoria Building to conduct an examination of Canada's international and national human rights obligations. It will hear from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies director of policy Sheryl Saperia.
- The Special Committee on Senate Modernization will meet at 12 p.m. in Room 257, East Block in-camera to consider a draft report on its study on methods to make the Senate more effective within the current constitutional framework.
- The Senate Banking, Trade and Commerce Committee will meet at 4:15 p.m. in Room 9, Victoria Building to consider clause-by-clause consideration on Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act (access to copyrighted works or other subject-matter for persons with perceptual disabilities).

THURSDAY, JUNE 16

- The second reading and debate of NDP MP Brian Masse's (Windsor West, Ont.) private members' business (Bill C-221) regarding a Fair and Regulated Sports Betting Act will commence.
- The House International Trade Committee will meet at 8:45 a.m. in Room 306, The Valour Building to continue public consultation on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. It will hear from Osgoode Hall Law professor Gus Van Harten; University of Toronto Scarborough Chief Librarian Victoria Owen; representatives from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Canadian Labour Congress; and the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada.
- The House Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. in Room 253-D, Centre Block to hear from Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Carolyn Bennett and her departmental officials on the Supplementary Estimates. This meeting will be televised.
- The House Industry, Science and Technology Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. in Room 306, The Valour Building to study the manufacturing sector. It will hear from Communitech Vice-President Avvey Peters; Futurpreneur Canada Chief Executive Officer Julia Deans; and Startup Canada Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Victoria Lennox.
- The Senate Banking, Trade and Commerce Committee will meet at 10:30 a.m. in Room 9, Victoria Building to study the present state of the domestic and international financial system. It will hear from Parliamentary Budget Officer Jean-Denis Fréchette and his PBO officials.
- The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee will meet at 10:30 a.m. in Room 257, East Block to study Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (detention in custody) and then begin a clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. It will hear from Conservative MP Michael Cooper (St. Albert-Edmonton, Alta.); Sponsor of the Bill Senator Bob Runciman; as an individual Shelley Wynn; Ottawa Police Services' Lara Malachenko; Ontario Provincial Police Superintendent David Truax; the Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada President Rae Banwarie; Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police legal counsel of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Rachel Huntsman; and Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness' Director and Public Safety John Muise.

FRIDAY, JUNE 17

- Conservative MP Ron Liepert's (Calgary Signal Hill, Alta.) private members' business, Bill C-229, Life Means Life Act, will be debated and read for a second time.

STATUS OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

HOUSE OF COMMONS

- C-2, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (third reading)
- C-4, An Act to Amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act (report stage)
- C-5, An Act to Repeal Division 20 of Part 3 of the Economic Action Plan 2015 Act, No. 1 (second reading)
- C-6, An Act to Amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act (third reading)
- C-12, An Act to Amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (second reading)
- C-13, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, the Hazardous Products Act, the Radiation Emitting Devices Act, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the Pest Control Products Act and the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act and to make related amendments to another Act (second reading)
- C-16, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (second reading)
- C-17, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act (second reading)
- C-18, An Act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act (second reading)

SENATE

- C-7, An Act to Amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures (committee)
- C-10, An Act to Amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to provide for certain other measures (second reading)
- C-11, An Act to Amend the Copyright Act (access to copyrighted works or other subject-matter for persons with perceptual disabilities) (committee)
- C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying) (third reading)
- C-15, Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1 (awaiting first reading)
- S-2, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act (second reading)

ROYAL ASSENT RECEIVED

- C-3, Appropriation Act No. 4, 2015-16
- C-8, Appropriation Act No. 5, 2015-16
- C-9, Appropriation Act No. 1, 2016-16