

## **NEW ENERGY ACT DOES LITTLE TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF RAMPANT HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

**Watershed Watch Salmon Society** was among many conservation organizations reacting with disappointment to the provincial government's recently-tabled "Clean Energy Act."

Four months ago, Watershed Watch joined the David Suzuki Foundation, West Coast Environmental Law, Pembina Institute, and 22 other environmental organizations to craft a set of practical recommendations for responsible clean electricity development in BC. "The new Act pays lip service to those recommendations and does little to address a host of environmental concerns associated with the explosion of river diversion projects in BC," said Dr. Craig Orr, executive director of Watershed Watch. "The new Act seems mostly about neutering the BC Utilities Commission, restricting their ability to protect the public interest, and paving the way for large-scale development of BC's streams and rivers to produce power for export to California. At least there's finally a bit of honesty about the export intent."

The Clean Energy Act comes with a vague commitment to strengthen the Environmental Assessment Act by providing for the assessment of cumulative environmental impacts. "Assessing the cumulative impacts of multiple projects is pointless without a commitment to minimize those impacts," said Orr. BC's Environmental Assessment Act was gutted by the Campbell government in 2002, raising the threshold for environmental assessment of hydro projects from 20 MW to 50 MW.

"The government's promise to not build any more major hydroelectric storage projects after Site C is disingenuous at best," said Dr. Orr. "The massive Bute Inlet project being proposed by Plutonic Power and General Electric involves damming and diverting 17 streams and rivers, which is hardly a minor hydroelectric project." The proposed 700-MW Klinaklini project just to the north of Bute, and the 4 rivers that are already being dammed and diverted by Plutonic and GE in Toba Inlet, also have large footprint impacts on fish and wildlife, and the cumulative effect of all this development would equal several Site C's.

The new Act claims to ban development of energy projects in parks and conservancies; however, Pristine Power's massive Klinaklini project, which would intrude on 3 newly created provincial conservancies in the Great Bear Rainforest, remains under consideration for an energy contract from BC Hydro. "Governments have changed park boundaries for development in the past, and nothing they've said about this Act suggests that they won't do the same for the Klinaklini," said Vicky Husband, veteran parks campaigner and senior advisor with Watershed Watch. Pristine Power Inc. topped the list of energy company donations to the BC Liberals in 2009.

The Green Energy Advisory Task Force, which informed the creation of the Act, was widely criticized for weak environmental representation and secrecy, including its controversial use of G-Mail accounts for accepting submissions, thus allowing it to skirt Access-to-Information laws. Its recommendations were not released until yesterday.

"It remains to be seen whether the Act's new Integrated Resource Plan will return some semblance of democracy and sustainability to energy planning in BC, or whether it will just be another industry-friendly rubber stamp," concluded Dr. Orr.

The "Recommendations for Responsible Clean Electricity Development" can be found here: <http://www.watershed-watch.org/publications/files/CleanElectricityRecommendations-Dec2009.pdf>

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