

Editorial

Government Apathy- A New Threat to Canada's Marine Animals and Their Environment



Recent federal budget cuts within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has created a new threat to marine animals and their habitat- a lack of apathy or concern towards the marine environment. Due to budget cutbacks, the Federal government plans on cutting back numerous programs and

letting go the people who run them. Over 1,000 DFO workers will be laid off in the months to come and several programs closed or scaled back as part of the federal cutbacks. The list of programs closing or being reduced is long and extensive- coast guard offices being closed, the number of marine traffic centres reduced, out sourcing of DFO observers on boats, the closure of field stations, fish hatcheries, and research stations.

The closure or scaling back of 2 programs within the federal government is of great relevance to marine animals and their environment. The first is the Environment Canada's Environmental Emergencies Program (EEP) within which operates the oil spill response unit. Most of the EEP's regional offices will be closed and consolidated into 2 offices only and the staff cut in half. The government claims that it will still be able to provide scientific advice during an emergency and that "neither Canadians nor the environment will be put at greater risk". However, Kati Terhune of the Living Oceans Society said that "If history shows us anything, it's that accidents happen. When we have an oil spill on our coasts, the government should be there to respond and protect the public from harm. Instead they are doing the exact opposite by shutting down emergency response centres." I guess it is the usual government way of obtuse thinking where doing less during a disaster is doing more as was seen with the inaction of the United States

government during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill last year.

The next serious cutback affecting marine animals is the reduction of or even no monitoring of pollutants in Canada's oceans. The federal government is totally ripping apart the entire ocean environment program that had laboratories across Canada studying various ocean contaminants within the marine environment and various marine animals. These laboratories contained many of the world's experts working within them and had an international reputation of doing leading edge studies. The list of experts and their discoveries dealing with contaminants and their effects in marine animals is amazing- Dr Peter Ross is a world renown expert on contaminants and marine mammals and reported numerous studies on contaminants and the orcas off the British Columbia coast; Dr Gary Stern who worked on mercury and its affects in the Arctic; Dr Michel Lebeuf who studied the belugas of the St Lawrence and the threat of contaminates to their continued existence; and Dr Michael Ikononou who studied endocrine disrupting contaminants such as flame retardants in salmon and other ocean species. All of these studies not only helped to possibly save thousands of marine species but also helped to protect the indigenous people who rely on them for food.

Now to be fair to our federal government they are not the only ones to seriously cut back on environmental programs that protect the environment. The U.S. government has reduced the budget of their Environmental Protection Agency's budget by 1.6 billion dollars. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) may have to close down the world's only undersea research lab, the Aquarius laboratory, as its annual budget was eliminated in the latest budget cuts. As well, the U.S Coast Guard that responds to emergencies and enforces environmental laws has had its budget cut by approximately 3 billion dollars.



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Is this all in an effort to save money or is it the present federal government's attitude of not caring about our environment in an effort to show support for large corporate projects such the Northern Gateway pipeline to the British Columbia coast or the Keystone pipeline going to the United States? If we look a bit deeper into why the DFO is being especially hard hit by these cutbacks, there could be other reasons. Gary Corbett of the union representing the scientists and researchers says: "It looks like this government is trying to de-regularize a lot of rules and policies in this country, things like how we monitor the habitat and protect resources. It seems to me this government is opening up those regulations so the resource can be tapped."

All of this means that protecting the environment is of no concern to the federal government who will only assume 'responsibility' for our natural environment and resources whenever it suits them. During a disaster it will be left up to the private companies to clean and restore our

environment which in recent disasters have revealed they will do the bare minimum in an effort to save money or protect their reputation to their stock owners and the public. Shortly after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill I was asked to review the emergency disaster plans of an oil company out west. I focussed on their wildlife response planning and efforts. No where was there any specific response planning or inclusion of any wildlife rehabilitation groups or centres to assist in the rescuing and rehabilitating of wildlife caught in the disaster. So it will be left up to organizations such as OERS to try to assist during disaster responses but I fear that the authorities in charge of or responsible for the disasters (ie federal government or private companies) will not allow OERS to step in to help. So add apathy to the long list of threats to marine animals and their environment making their continued existence looking even more grim.

Michael Belanger
Associate Editor, JMATE

ANNOUNCEMENT

JMATE launches new section featuring student manuscripts

JMATE is pleased to launch a new section under 'Original Manuscripts' specifically dedicated to encourage students in the field of marine animal research to publish their work in a peer review journal. Though the manuscripts will undergo the same rigorous review afforded all submissions, consideration will be given that the first author is a student, and certain expectations will be adjusted. It is imperative that the work was done by a student under the supervision or mentorship of an active scientist in the field, who should be the senior author on the paper. Whenever possible, we hope to include at least one paper by a student with each issue, assuming the submission meets the appropriate criteria and standards of the journal.

We would like to encourage students at every level from undergraduate, masters or PhD training to consider submitting their work for review. It is our hope that supervisors/mentors of these future leaders in the marine animal field will support and promote this initiative; which will give students at all levels the opportunity to gain experience in publishing their research work.

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