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GREEN GROUPS NATIONWIDE DEMAND SENATE REMOVE UNDEMOCRATIC ATTACKS ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FROM BUDGET BILL

Vancouver, BC—Proposed Budget bill allowed to pass House of Commons by MPs seeking to avoid an election contains buried sections that dangerously rewrite environmental assessment laws. Enviro groups ask Senate to put a stop to the bill.

In a letter sent to all Senators today (attached), fourteen environmental groups from across Canada are urging the Senate to cut provisions from the 2010 Budget Bill that would significantly weaken the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (“CEAA”). CEAA is a vital piece of legislation which requires environmental assessments for development projects including major projects such as tar sands, mines, oil and gas pipelines, and nuclear power plants. The Senate will consider the Bill once the House of Commons passes it at third reading, which appears certain.

“The government has buried these significant changes deep its massive budget bill to make it virtually impossible for the opposition to resist them without causing an election,” says Josh Paterson, staff lawyer at West Coast Environmental Law in Vancouver. “It’s undemocratic to use the Budget to ram through an attack on Canada’s environmental laws, and it undermines Parliament’s purpose as the place where our laws are debated and improved. That’s why all Senators must act as guardians of Parliament’s right to have a full and separate debate on these changes, by cutting them out of the Budget.”

The proposed changes will have serious consequences for the way environmental assessment is conducted in Canada. For example, the changes allow the Minister of the Environment to avoid doing detailed environmental assessments on large projects by breaking the projects up into smaller pieces – in a major move that undoes the Supreme Court of Canada’s recent decision that this is illegal under CEAA, and amounts to avoidance of environmental regulations. Because the changes have been included in the Budget, the government is attempting to force MPs to accept the amendments or else trigger an election. Opposition parties have objected to the changes but have yet to commit to action.

“We need the Senate to do its job and give serious and sober second thought to the gutting of environmental assessment contained in the Budget,” said Jessica Clogg, West Coast’s Executive Director and Senior Counsel. “Last year the government succeeded in weakening environmental laws by hiding the changes in the Budget. This undemocratic practice has to stop now,” Clogg added, referring to last year’s budget bill that amended *CEAA regulations* and weakened the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*.

Parliament is legally required to begin a review of CEAA in June, which Clogg noted is the right time to take an in-depth look at environmental assessment law and to update it so that it addresses critical issues such as climate change.

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For more information:

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Attachment: letter