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## **LAWYERS CALL ON SENATE TO KEEP ATTACK ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW OUT OF FEDERAL BUDGET**

**Vancouver, BC—Senate National Finance Committee heeds objections from conservation groups and votes to cut sections from federal budget that would severely weaken environmental assessment in Canada. Environmental lawyers call on full Senate to keep provisions out of the bill in final vote.**

On July 6, West Coast Environmental Law Association testified along with other environmental groups before the Senate National Finance Committee reviewing the 2010 Budget bill, which contains sections that would significantly weaken the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (“CEAA”). West Coast Environmental Law recommended that the committee cut the attack on environmental law from the Budget. Today, in Ottawa, the Senate Finance Committee has voted to do that.

“We are encouraged by the Senate Finance Committee’s decision to stop this undemocratic attack on laws protecting Canada’s environment,” says Josh Paterson, staff lawyer at West Coast Environmental Law Association in Vancouver. “We’re pleased that the Senators on the committee are doing their job by giving serious and sober second thought to the gutting of environmental assessment buried deeply in the Budget.”

The Senate Finance Committee voted not to keep the environmental assessment provisions in the Budget bill. The amended budget will now return to the full Senate for a vote, where senators may attempt to restore the provisions that have been cut from the bill. The proposed changes would have had serious consequences for the way environmental assessment is conducted in Canada. For example, the changes would have allowed 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 would undo the Supreme Court of Canada’s recent decision that this is illegal under CEAA, amounting to an avoidance of environmental regulations. 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 government had buried these significant changes deep within a towering, 900-page budget bill, attempting to hide them from public scrutiny, discussion or debate. Today the Senate Finance Committee has decided to put a stop to that undemocratic practice.” said Jessica Clogg, West Coast’s Executive Director and Senior Counsel. “We hope that the full Senate will listen to its Finance Committee, and vote to keep the weakening of environmental law out of the federal budget.”

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:

Josh Paterson, Staff Counsel, West Coast Environmental Law: (778) 829-8973, [www.wcel.org](http://www.wcel.org)