

## Harper govt gutting fish habitat protection

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Tuesday, 29 May 2012 12:51

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The Harper govt in its Omnibus Budget legislation Bill C-38 is destroying the environmental assessment process in Canada and gutting the fish habitat provisions of the Fisheries Act. There has been a widespread negative reaction to this move by environmental groups, university scientists and opposition politicians. This reaction is grounded in facts.

Removing protection for fish habitats is drawing the most fire. Currently Section 35 of the Fisheries Act requires an environmental review before someone can alter or destroy a body of water that is vital to the life cycle of fish. The Conservative bill kills the reference to habitat and instead places protection on fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or aboriginal fishery.

I worked for the government for 35 years before retiring in 2002. I oversaw fish habitat as Fisheries and Oceans assistant deputy minister from 1994 to 1999. I quickly learned that environmental groups considered Section 35 the most crucial piece of environmental legislation in the country. In a recent interview with the Halifax Chronicle Herald I pointed out that this is "much more than a minor definitional change. Basically, they're gutting the Fisheries Act. They're gutting the most powerful piece of environmental legislation in Canada. In my opinion, it's a regressive move, a move back to the Stone Age of fish habitat management." <http://thchronicleherald.ca/canada/90484-critics-assail-conservatives-for-gutting-fisheries-protections>

TAGS: sustainable, fisheries, fish habitat, habitat protection, Fisheries Act, Scott Parsons

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