

Scientists engage Science in fisheries debate

June 21 2012

Three Simon Fraser University scientists are engaging in a verbal battle with the federal government over its budget cuts and legislative changes in departments with environmental responsibilities, on a powerful stage.

Science, a research journal with more than one million readers worldwide, has just published online (appearing in the June 22 hardcopy issue) a letter to the editor written by the SFU trio.

In their letter, Canada's Weakening Aquatic Protection, Brett Favaro, a biology doctoral student, and biology professors John Reynolds and Isabelle Côté criticize the federal government's proposal to reduce fish habitat protection.

The three scientists, all members of the SFU biology department's Earth2Ocean Group, engage in collaborative research that tackles global questions in conservation and ecology of aquatic systems.

They use *Science* to challenge the government's rationale for reducing protection of fish habitat in [Canada](#). The authors argue that the fish habitat protection provision of the Fisheries Act seldom obstructs farming and other routine activities, contrary to the federal fisheries minister's assertions.

Their letter states: "The Fisheries Minister argued that current polices go 'well beyond what is necessary to protect fish' ... The continued decline of Canadian fish and other aquatic species due to habitat loss and degradation suggests otherwise ... Canada should stand up to its

responsibility as first signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity and steward of the world's longest coastline and largest lakes."

The authors hope their letter's appearance in *Science* will encourage the government to return to what they call evidence-based policy creation in Canada. "While recent changes to environmental management in Canada have drawn widespread criticism," notes Favaro, "as scientists we are uniquely positioned to provide an independent and evidence-based critique of the rationale for each of these changes."

Favaro adds the [federal government](#) is being influenced dangerously by anecdotal and ideological arguments. "I believe that you can't govern by anecdotes. You need to thoroughly examine the effects of changing laws, especially laws such as those that have been protecting fish habitat and sustaining fisheries in Canada since 1977."

Favaro is particularly pleased that [Science](#)'s publication of this letter dovetails with RIO+20, the ongoing United Nations conference on sustainable development in Brazil.

"I do hope that the more extreme changes enacted by the Canadian government are challenged at this meeting," says Favaro.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

Citation: Scientists engage Science in fisheries debate (2012, June 21) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-scientists-engage-science-fisheries-debate.html>

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