



NEWS RELEASE

July 28th

For Immediate Release

New professional reliance report reaffirms Ombudsperson's recommendations

Victoria – Today's report commissioned by government that examines the way industry-hired professionals conduct environmental assessments and monitoring underscores the need to increase oversight that has been recommended by the Ombudsperson since 2014.

The report prepared for the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy by reviewer Mark Haddock recommends that government establish an independent Office of Professional Regulation and Oversight and makes additional recommendations aimed at strengthening the overall regulatory regime.

"These recommendations very clearly align with ones we have made in the past," said Ombudsperson Jay Chalke. "I am hopeful government will make critical changes that my office and others have been continuing to recommend."

The Ombudsperson's 2014 report *Striking a Balance* examined the challenges of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Operations using a professional reliance model in environmental protection, specifically how professionals have been used in relation to British Columbia's regulation of riparian areas. The report found there were significant gaps in the oversight framework relating to the work done by these professionals and made 25 recommendations in a number of key areas that align with recommendations made in today's report.

In the four years since *Striking a Balance* was released, the ministry has implemented some of the recommendations aimed at improving oversight of the professional reliance model in the *Riparian Areas Regulation*. Key implemented recommendations include:

- The ministry follows a process to confirm that at the time an assessment report is submitted, all qualified environmental professionals (QEPs) involved in its preparation are registered and in good standing with one of the appropriate professional associations (Recommendation 4)
- The ministry, in cooperation with the relevant professional associations, completed and released professional practice guidelines in July 2017. These guidelines set out a standard of professional conduct for individuals who conduct assessments under the *RAR* (Recommendation 7).
- The ministry has completed and posted on its website a written complaints process (Recommendation 22) and has an internal document for tracking and responding to complaints (Recommendation 23). The ministry has committed to reporting on complaints and concerns as part of its regular reporting (Recommendation 24).



“While these steps demonstrate that some progress has been made, there is much more that can be done to improve the professional reliance model,” said Chalke. “As we continue to monitor these recommendations, there are a number of outstanding recommendations that have not yet been addressed.” Key outstanding recommendations include:

- Requiring successful completion of a training course for all individuals conducting assessments under the *RAR*, and making public a list of individuals who have successfully completed the course (Recommendation 5) – Today’s report supplements this recommendation with an additional emphasis on ongoing evaluation of professionals.
- Establishing expiry dates for reports and ensuring relevant parties are notified of a report’s expiration (Recommendations 8 and 9)
- Using site visits and other oversight mechanisms to better assess and track compliance and taking appropriate action where non-compliance is detected (Recommendations 11, 13 and 15)
- Developing processes to assess a site after development has occurred for the purpose of ensuring the QEP’s recommendations have been followed and if not, taking appropriate action (Recommendation 20)

“In addition to implementing these specific recommendations, there is no question that there is still significant work ahead to ensure that all British Columbians have trust in environmental decision-making more generally,” said Chalke. “The additional light that this report sheds today is another important step in that direction.”

Media Contact: Sara Darling | Communications Lead | B.C. Office of the Ombudsperson | 778 679.2588