

CAMPAIGN FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT
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You Can Handle the Truth!

**BC GOV'T BUILDS WALL OF SECRECY
AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTS**

Citizen's Right to Know Secondary to Corporate Desire for Confidentiality

Vancouver – The Campaign for Open Government (COG) is raising the alarm on two bills recently introduced to the BC Legislature. “Both of these bills limit the public’s right to know in relation to what is becoming the most pressing issue of our time – global warming,” commented COG spokesperson Darrell Evans.

Bills 16 and 18 both concern the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions. Both also have 'confidentiality' clauses that will override BC's Freedom of Information act and would allow extremely important information to be withheld from public view.

“The clauses do this with Orwellian language that defines information as 'supplied' to government by corporations even if it is not supplied at all but originates within government, and supplied 'in confidence' even if it wasn't," said Evans.

The clauses can be applied to 'commercial, financial, labour relations, scientific or technical information of the fuel supplier or another person.' “This language is very broad, very vague, and very worrisome,” added Gwen Barlee, Policy Director of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and COG member.

Barlee pointed out that these bills – combined with the BC government’s creation of a climate action committee last year that is outside the reach of BC’s FOI act – is starting to show a pattern of secrecy when it comes to government plans and actions around climate change. “Global warming is currently the most talked about topic, but the BC government is treating it as a top secret,” concluded Barlee.

The clauses also broaden the scope of confidential information from 'trade secrets' to 'information *with respect to* a trade secret'. “You could drive a truck through that definition,” said Evans, “It’s very sweeping and very ambiguous”.

Evans added that the Information and Privacy Commissioner posted public letters to the Ministers of environment and resources on Monday raising similar concerns. In the letters David Loukidelis writes, “FIPPA’s provisions override every other enactment, unless the other enactment expressly overrides FIPPA. Only a relatively small number of these overrides have been enacted in the seventeen years since FIPPA came into force. [These bills] would unnecessarily add to that number and this is a matter of significant concern considering the importance of environmental protection measures relating to climate change and the need for openness and accountability in the monitoring and enforcement of such measures” (See <http://www.oipcbc.org/>).

“Once again the BC Liberals are putting corporations’ desire to keep secrets ahead of the public’s right to know,” concluded Evans. “We urge them to immediately bring the confidentiality clauses of these bills into line with the FOI act.”