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## **Canada chided over environmental commitment**

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GLOBE AND MAIL UPDATE

Canada is failing to live up to its environmental commitments, according to a new report released Monday by the Sierra Club of Canada.

In its 13th annual Report on International Obligations (RIO) Report Card, the Sierra Club flunked the federal government for failing to follow through on its commitments to reform pesticide and toxic chemical policies, to make trade and the environment mutually supportive, and to protect marine life.

But critics of the report said it is selective in the information it uses to base the grades on.

In the report, the Sierra Club argues the federal government has been lax in regulating the pesticide industry and has taken a wrong turn in allowing Albertan tar sands to be exploited for fuel because it is the most hazardous way to the environment of producing oil.

The reports also singles out the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for what the reports says are its failing efforts to protect aquaculture.

“The low point is the performance of the Department of Fisheries and Ocean,” said John Bennett, a Sierra Club senior policy adviser, “We've renamed it in the ‘Department of Fish Farms and Oil.’”

Mr. Bennett said the DFO has consistently failed to mount strong opposition to offshore oil exploration in B.C., Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

The DFO has also done little to curb the proliferation of fish farms, the report argues, and that has placed the fisheries on both coasts are in jeopardy.

But, Mark Burgham, the DFO's director of aquaculture policy, said the DFO was not consulted about the report during its writing and he questioned the information it was based on.

“I'm disappointed in the report, because if they wanted to accurately reflect what is actually being done, they should have consulted us,” Mr. Burgham said.

Mr. Burgham said the DFO has taken several initiatives to improve aquaculture around fish farms, from tightening regulations on where farms can be placed to lessening the amount of waste discharged.

Mr. Bennett said the report's methodology is to survey environmental organizations across the country and put forth a paper on their findings. The facts contained in the report are substantiated by the Sierra Club before publication, he added.

“This is a grade based on organizations around the country, their point of view and their findings,” Mr. Bennett said.

But, the report card is not focused entirely on the federal government. It also grades the provincial governments as well.

In the provincial review, the Sierra Club had some star pupils — Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland/Labrador, and Quebec — while New Brunswick and Nova Scotia made some progress in protecting biodiversity.

PEI received the report's only ‘A’ for its efforts in combat climate change (it actually received an A-).

The Sierra Club report commends the Maritime province on its climate change strategy, and PEI also received accolades for green lighting public transit in Charlottetown, and for pursuing alternative fuel sources. The province has also hired a climate change coordinator and is now offering tax rebates on hybrid cars and renewable energy sources like solar power.

PEI Minister of Environment, Energy, and Forestry Jamie Ballem said PEI has made a concerted effort to become self-sufficient and environmentally-friendly in its pursuit of alternative energy sources.

“I’m very pleased with (the report). It’s nice to see that our province is being recognized by a national organization like the Sierra Club,” Mr. Ballem said.

PEI was the first to sign on to the federal climate change initiative in 2003, and the province aimed to have 15 per cent of its energy supply from renewable sources by 2010, he said.

“We’re going to reach that goal by 2006,” Mr. Ballem said. “We’ve hit a lot of the high points, and we’re trying to do is establish ourselves as a national, if not a North American leader in renewable energy.”

On the other hand, Alberta and British Columbia were given ‘F’s in all three categories.

“Gordon Campbell’s B.C. government, with its commitment to significant cut-backs in the civil service, emphasis on reducing the “regulatory burden” for forest companies and commitment to lifting the offshore oil and gas moratorium, has brought down BC’s grade considerably,” the report states.

“The approach of the Klein government allows as much off-highway vehicle use, oil and gas development, open-pit coal mining, logging, irrigated agriculture and public lands grazing as the proponents could wish, with minimal environmental regulations and enforcement, no conservation strategy, no meaningful implementation of species recovery plans, no involvement of the public in decisions on development applications for their public lands and waters, unless they have a property or financial right that is directly affected, and little or no regard for the devastating, cumulative impact on biological diversity,” it goes on to state.

Robert Moyles, spokesman for Alberta Environment, said despite the provinces ranking, it has done a lot in the way of pursuing climate change initiatives.

Mr. Moyles said Alberta is the only province with a climate change initiative backed by legislation; 90 per cent of the energy used in provincial building is from renewable sources; it has given \$100 million to municipalities to retrofit their buildings; and has implemented a carbon credit program and given funding to the oil and gas industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“It doesn't matter what we do, we always seem to get an ‘F’,” Mr. Moyles said.

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