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Reprint from Volume 19 Number 2

January 25, 2007

Commentary by David Boyd

Forty Questions About Canada's Environmental Record

Canada's new Environment Minister John Baird has his work cut out for him, and not just in terms of repairing the *Clean Air Act* and grappling with Canada's legal obligations under Kyoto. Baird claims that he will clean up Canada's environment this year, a feat that would require divine intervention. More modestly, Baird could start by answering the following vexing questions about Canada's ongoing failures in the realm of environmental protection.

Why does Canada rank 28th out of the 30 nations of the OECD in environmental stewardship?

Why are Scandinavian nations, with stronger environmental regulations, higher taxes, and more generous social programs than Canada, ranked by the World Economic Forum as more economically competitive?

Why has Canada repeatedly broken its promise to develop a national sustainability strategy?

Why is Canada the only western industrialized nation that still relies on unenforceable, ineffective, voluntary national guidelines for air quality? Why are the majority of Canada's voluntary air quality guidelines set at weaker levels than mandatory standards in other nations?

Why does Canada continue to rely on unenforceable, ineffective, voluntary national guidelines for drinking water despite the recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry?

Why are the majority of Canada's voluntary drinking water quality guidelines set at weaker levels than mandatory standards in other nations?

Why did the Liberals do so little to address climate change?

Why are the Conservatives doing so little to address climate change?

Why doesn't Prime Minister Harper talk about Canada becoming a zero-carbon energy superpower?

Why is Canada still subsidizing development of the oil sands?

Why not regulate the energy efficiency of buildings and the fuel efficiency of motor vehicles, given that Canada already regulates the energy efficiency of many products, from refrigerators to furnaces?

Why is industry still allowed to dump millions of kilograms of carcinogens, hormone disruptors, respiratory toxins, and reproductive/developmental toxins into Canada's air, water, and land annually?

Why does Canada refuse to require mandatory disclosure of toxic substances in consumer products?

Why are mining companies being allowed to use beautiful Canadian lakes as tailing ponds for their toxic wastes?

Why does Canada continue to allow the use of 58 chemicals, used in over 1,000 pesticide products, which have been banned by other industrialized nations because of health and environmental concerns?

Why are Canadian standards for pesticide residues on food weaker than the standards in other nations?

Why are agricultural pesticides exempt from the GST?

Why is there so little government support for organic agriculture?

Why is Canada proposing to ban hazardous flame retardants that have already been phased out by manufacturers while allowing the continued use of a widely-used flame retardant that is exponentially increasing in women's breast milk, wildlife, and the environment?

Why is Canada proposing a new guideline for radon, a substance that kills thousands of Canadians annually, that is weaker than the comparable United States guideline?

Why is Canada violating federal law by systematically failing to identify (let alone protect) the critical habitat of endangered species ranging from the killer whale in BC to the piping plover in Nova Scotia?

Why is Canada's system of national parks still incomplete despite repeated promises that it would be finished by 2000?

Why has Canada protected so little (less than 0.1%) of its six million square kilometers of ocean?

Why is Canada one of a handful of nations that opposes international efforts to limit the destructive practice of bottom trawling on the high seas?

Why, after the notorious collapse of the cod fishery, does Canada still allow commercial fisheries to target species for which we have no stock information?

Why are major Canadian cities still allowed to dump raw, untreated sewage directly into the ocean?

Why does Canada, unlike the US, Australia, and Europe, have no action plan for health and the environment?

Why has Canada never undertaken a national bio-monitoring study to measure the levels of toxic substances Canadians are being exposed to?

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'This article was published (January 25, 2007) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 17,500 print copies in throughout the Gulf Islands and the Canadian Strait of Georgia from Tsawwassen to Campbell River, BC.'

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Why has Canada failed to conduct a national survey of the blood-lead levels of young children since 1979, when more than one million American children are tested annually in an effort to eliminate harmful lead exposure?

Why does Canada allow lead levels in juice that are twenty times higher than drinking water when children drink the most juice and are the most vulnerable to neurological damage from lead exposure?

Why has there never been a debate in the House of Commons about the potential health and environmental hazards of the rapidly emerging field of nanotechnology (manipulating matter at the atomic or molecular level)?

Why is Canada the only nation in the world that actively opposes recognition of the basic human right to water?

Why does the federal government refuse to recognize that Canadians have a fundamental human right to drink clean water, breathe clean air, and live in a healthy environment?

Why is Canada the only industrialized nation that exports large volumes of asbestos to developing countries despite overwhelming evidence of the brutal effects on human health?

Why does Canada oppose international efforts to place stronger restrictions on the use of mercury, a heavy metal that can cause extensive damage to human health?

Why is Canada lagging behind Europe and Japan in passing laws making manufacturers responsible for recycling, reusing, or remanufacturing their products?

Why is Canada lagging behind Europe in shifting taxes from employment and income onto waste and pollution?

Why do Canadians keep electing politicians who fail to make the environment a priority?

Why are the day-to-day actions of many individual Canadians at odds with our professed environmental values?

Answers?

Given Stephen Harper's identification of the environment as one of his five priorities, the selection of Stephane Dion as the leader of the Liberals, the rise of the Green Party's fortunes under Elizabeth May, and polls indicating unprecedented levels of concern among Canadians for environmental issues, perhaps 2007 will be the year when some of these questions get answered.

David R Boyd is an environmental lawyer, author, and Trudeau Scholar at the University of British Columbia. His books include 'Unnatural Law: Rethinking Canadian Environmental Law and Policy,' 2003, UBC Press, \$29.95 paperback, order online www.unnaturallaw.com.

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