Le Très Honorable Stephen Joseph Harper, Premier Ministre du Canada Édifice Langevin 80, Rue Willington Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

## Monsieur le Premier Ministre,

## cc. Honorable Keith Ashfield, Ministre des Pêches et des Océans cf. Amendements potentiels à l'article 35 de la Loi sur les pêches

Nous sommes un groupe de scientifiques canadiens comprenant plusieurs des plus éminents écologistes des milieux aquatiques et nous vous écrivons pour vous faire part de notre profonde préoccupation au fait que la protection des habitats pourrait bientôt être rayée de la Loi sur les pêches. Nous croyons qu'il s'agirait là d'une mauvaise décision pour le Canada, laquelle mettrait en péril de nombreuses populations de poissons, ainsi que les lacs, les estuaires et les rivières qui les supportent. Nous vous prions d'abandonner prestement cette initiative, telle qu'elle est actuellement envisagée.

Selon ce qui est rapporté par les médias, nous comprenons que votre gouvernement désire accélérer les procédures d'acceptation pour le bénéfice de projets de développements économiques d'envergure. Cependant, nous croyons que l'affaiblissement de la protection des habitats selon l'article 35 de la Loi sur les pêches aura un impact très négatif sur la qualité des ressources hydriques ainsi que sur les pêches à travers tout le pays et pourrait miner la crédibilité du Canada en matière d'environnement sur le plan international.

L'habitat est l'environnement aquatique et/ou terrestre nécessaire à la survie de toute espèce, incluant le poisson. Toutes les espèces, incluant aussi l'espèce humaine, dépendent d'habitats sains qui sont à la base du bon fonctionnement des écosystèmes. Ainsi, le nombre d'espèces animales et végétales pouvant être supporté est directement proportionnel à la disponibilité d'habitats qui procurent les ressources essentielles à leur survie. La destruction d'habitats représente en fait la plus importante cause du déclin des espèces, ce qui est un fait reconnu par tous les écologistes et scientifiques des pêches du monde entier. La Loi sur les pêches a toujours été un outil essentiel à la protection des habitats pour les poissons ainsi que l'industrie des pêches qu'ils supportent au Canada. Il ne fait aucun doute que l'affaiblissement de la protection des habitats projetterait une image irresponsable du Canada sur la scène internationale.

Dans le cas des pêches, l'ensablement des frayères et la contamination des aires d'élevage des jeunes poissons représentent les deux causes de pertes d'habitats les plus communes associées aux activités humaines. Nous devrions donc renforcer plutôt qu'affaiblir la protection des habitats selon la Loi sur les pêches (ainsi que d'autres lois à caractère environnemental, tel que la Loi sur les espèces en péril et la Loi de 1994 sur la convention concernant les oiseaux migrateurs), dans l'optique de protéger nos pêcheries en déclin constant ainsi que les espèces en péril.

Nous comprenons de plus que votre gouvernement propose que les mesures de protection des habitats de poissons ne s'appliquent dorénavant qu'aux « pêcheries de valeur économique, culturelle et écologique ». Ceci ne fait aucun sens du point de vue scientifique ou économique. Toutes les espèces ont une valeur écologique, un fait d'ailleurs reconnu par la loi actuelle. À titre d'exemple, plusieurs de nos espèces comptant parmi les plus importantes d'un point de vue économique ou culturel se nourrissent principalement de petits poissons ou d'autres espèces réputées «résistantes», leur permettant ainsi de croître et survivre.

En somme, si votre gouvernement désire modifier la Loi sur les pêches ou toutes autres lois en lien avec la santé des écosystèmes du Canada, nous recommandons que vous vous assuriez que toute nouvelle législation soit améliorée sur la base des meilleures connaissances scientifiques disponibles. Il est absolument primordial que les changements éventuels ne portent aucun préjudice aux habitats sur lesquels dépend notre bien-être et celui des générations futures.

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