

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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August 1, 2001

Hon. Richard Neufeld
Minister of Energy and Mines
PO Box 9060
STN Prov. Gov.
Victoria, BC, Canada
V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Neufeld,

Re: Offshore Oil and Gas Moratorium

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we are writing to express our concern regarding the potential lifting of British Columbia's offshore oil and gas moratorium. PSG is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG draws its members from the rim of the entire Pacific Basin, including Canada, the United States, Mexico, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, state and federal officials who manage seabird populations and refuges, and individuals with interests in marine conservation. Canada has many seabird scientists who are prominent throughout the world, and most are members of PSG. Over the years we have advised and worked with government agencies to further these interests. PSG is especially active with regard oil spill restoration and seabird-fishery conflicts.

The North Coast waters of British Columbia, particularly Hecate Strait, support large populations of marine birds. For example, these waters are home to the majority of the world's population of Ancient Murrelets and hundreds of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters which migrate there each summer and fall from the Southern Hemisphere.

PSG would like to ensure that the decision makers and public of British Columbia are aware of the importance of the North Coast to these and many other seabird species. We would like to ensure that existing data on seabird populations of the affected region, available primarily from the Canadian Wildlife Service, be thoroughly examined during the consultation process to consider lifting the moratorium, and that the impacts of oil and gas exploration on marine bird populations be addressed as a major issue.

The 1972 Federal moratorium was established due to concern over supertanker traffic in Hecate Strait. The 1989 Provincial moratorium was established in response to public concern over the environmental impacts of the *Nestucca* and *Exxon Valdez* oil spills. Last year, major oil spills from tankers in South Africa and the Galapagos Islands caused serious damage to marine resources. Oil and gas development on the British Columbia coast would create the risk of similar events occurring in your waters. The Northern Development Commissioner's report on the moratorium consultation process recommends that experts in various fields should present relevant information to the public and to decision makers. We agree, and would like to see comprehensive, transparent, peer-reviewed environmental risk assessments for potential development on the North Coast made available to all. This is a very important issue for British Columbia and Canada and requires appropriate, measured deliberation.

Many PSG scientists have extensive experience with issues relevant to the impacts of oil development on seabirds. We would be very interested in bringing the scientific expertise of our members to your forum.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation

cc: John Backhouse, Northern BC Development Commissioner
Hon. Rick Thorpe, Minister of Competition, Science, and Enterprise
Hon. Joyce Murray, Minister of Water, Land, and Air Protection
Hon. Gordon Campbell, Premier
Hon. David Anderson, Minister of the Environment
Hon Ralph Goodale, Minister of Natural Resources Canada
Hon Herb Daliwal, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans