

# Overview of BC Business Magazine's Recent Critique of Environmental Assessments

**IN THEIR JULY** 2015 issue, BC Business Magazine featured an article by Anne Casselman titled *The Problem with (self-regulated) environmental assessments* (pp. 58-65). The article provided a critical review of environmental assessment processes both in BC and in Canada. Casselman argued that the increasing reliance on self-regulation and self-reporting has undermined the reliability of environmental assessment processes.

In developing the article, Casselman spoke with several environmental consultants –including two Registered Professional Biologists– who are under considerable pressure to produce desirable results for project proponents that hire their firms. Furthermore, they stated that sometimes their professional interpretations or advice has been changed. In addition, the article alluded to concern over RPBios having the authority to “vouch that a project won't harm fish or fish habitat”, without scrutiny or oversight by the government –Fisheries and Oceans Canada in this case.

The author interviewed Mark Haddock, UVic law instructor and author of the 2015 report *Professional Reliance and Environmental Regulation in British Columbia*. Mr. Haddock pointed out that cutbacks in government staffing have resulted in increasing reliance on “the quality and professional integrity of assessments being done by proponents”, which is the premise of BC's professional reliance regime adopted over a decade ago.

A key point raised in this article was that it is often business or project managers who lead large environmental consulting projects, and they may prioritize the company's bottom line over the professional ethics or integrity of members on their team. Although it is not unique to College members, we acknowledge that this is a challenge and that part of the solution lies in continuing to promote the value and credibility of professional applied biology designations (RPBio and RBTech).

In closing, the article highlighted the perceived conflict that occurs when a project proponent hires environmental assessment practitioners who have the duty to provide decision-makers with objective information in the interest of the environment and the public. The article identified possible solutions, such as encouraging stronger professional practices, having government select consulting firms for projects, and developing clear guidelines and minimum standards for scientific research used in environmental assessments to reduce variability in approaches.

While the article raised some important challenges associated with the environmental assessment process and the professional reliance regime, it also questioned the authority and credibility of College members, so the College was compelled to respond. The response the College submitted to BC Business Magazine is featured on the opposite page. A selective excerpt from this response was printed in the October issue of BC Business Magazine (see below). 

To read the BC Business Magazine article, visit: <http://www.bcbusiness.ca/natural-resources/the-problem-with-self-regulated-environmental-assessments>

## Assessing the Assessor

Anne Casselman's story about B.C.'s environmental assessment (EA) process (“Watching the Detectives,” July 2015) caught the attention of Pierre Iachetti, executive director of the College of Applied Biology in Victoria. The college's mandate is to protect the public interest by ensuring

the integrity, objectivity and expertise of applied biology professionals. While Iachetti feels that it is overbroad to suggest that the self-regulating, self-reporting model of EA compromises the environment and the public interest for the sake of “the almighty dollar,” he notes that Casselman's critique is similar to other analyses and that the interests of employers or clients often take precedence.

“Within all of this discussion is the fact that reliance on professionals does not supplant the responsibility of government to ensure objectives are clear and practices are in the public interest,” he writes. “A higher level of transparency by professionals, proponents/clients, employers and government is required if the public is to be confident in the professional reliance approach.” ■

Reference to the College's response to the EA article from the October issue of BC Business Magazine.