



*An open reply:*

*Premier-designate must direct removal of assault-style rifles from public service*

Premier-designate  
Mr. David Eby  
Province of British Columbia

**14 November 2022**

An open reply: Recall of assault-style weapons in the public service (Ministry Reference: 393352).

We appreciate the ministry's response dated 8 November 2022 (Appendix #1). We kindly offer the information below in reply and await your confirmation of our meeting request.

### **Public services are important**

As part of our collective conservation work, we recognize the important services law enforcement agencies provide to the public and our environment. Agencies like the Canadian Wildlife Service, the B.C. Conservation Officer Service (BCCOS), Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Forest Service are foundational departments in the protection of our natural environment in Beautiful British Columbia.

### **Outstanding matters**

While at times we are critical of environmental law enforcement services, it is important to note that reform and improvement are essential components to accountability of government departments. Broader conservation objectives in wildlife management activities require our elected officials to understand the central and critical role that environmental law enforcement services provide. With the front-facing and public role of law enforcement comes great responsibility and the need for the highest standards of accountability and transparency. This is especially true in areas of use of force on humans and non-human species, as is happening in the wolf cull and human-bear coexistence responses.

### **In environmental law enforcement, a lack of strict controls and operational guidelines place an immense amount of liability and responsibility on individual officers – often without their knowledge.**

This responsibility can take its toll over time, affecting family life, personal health, community relations, and work performance. Leadership which refuses to acknowledge valid public and officer concerns, or address poor organizational cultures, can have an escalating effect on existing tensions at the community, agency internal, and larger political levels. This increases cumulative risk over time to the public and individual officers, both on and off duty.

## **Staff must not take assault-style rifles home**

With the above in mind, it is imperative that the premier-designate recall assault-style weapons within the B.C. public service. For the former executive director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, and a lawyer having a Pivot Legal Society history, **the purchase and use of these weapons undermines Mr. Eby's own work in police reform and accountability.** The direction of the B.C. NDP on this matter is at odds with previous calls for independent civilian oversight environmental policing in B.C. and the deployment of body cameras on law enforcement officers. In today's climate, with the current federal government's ban on military assault-style rifles, it is incredulous that the provincial NDP administration would allow staff to possess and use these weapons without being transparent about purchasing, training, storage and use. In the wake of the École Polytechnique massacre and the more recent shootings in Nova Scotia, the B.C. NDP's approach lacks credibility and sensitivity. The result is paramilitarization in our communities.

The premier-designate must understand that his administration has created an unnecessary probability of escalating officer use of force on non-human and human lives, thereby contributing to greater government liabilities in the long term and broader public safety risks. For many years the public has called and advocated for increased transparency in wildlife killings and use of force on the public by environmental law enforcement officers. Independent civilian oversight, body cameras, transparent complaints processes, and cries for modernization and accountability have been plenty. **But instead of body cameras and greater transparency, the public is presented with assault-style rifles and further paramilitarization – a spending priority that runs counter to the very values of the party Mr. Eby represents.**

## **An offer to de-escalate**

Our calls for change in environmental policing are just that – calls for change and reform. It is reasonable to expect program development and modernization in today's social climate. It is reasonable to ask for controls that provide levels of liability protection. We do not advocate for the disbandment of environmental policing services. However, we do advocate to raise awareness about the ever-expanding mandate of environmental law enforcement services and the need for greater accountability, transparency, and civilian oversight.

## **Our intentions are to work with elected officials, the public, and environmental law enforcement services to further the discussion of accountability and oversight.**

With the greatest respect, we do not find that your ministry's response letter has addressed any of the substantive concerns we have previously raised. We do find, however, that much of the boiler plate letter reveals a pro-gun narrative and escalatory language. Matters which have been highlighted for your ministry on numerous occasions. **For this reason, we request a meeting with the premier-designate and the responsible environment minister (cc'd here) at your earliest opportunity, and in any event, prior to January 2023.**

In preparation for that meeting (which we trust will be granted), please be advised we will be asking to view a copy of the Chief Firearms Officer exemption permit for using prohibited high-capacity magazines in the wolf cull, which was referenced by Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) in their responses to CBC News and other outlets. We will be seeking confirmation that a standardized psychological screening process is being universally administered for BCCOS officers who have access to

these weapons and prohibited items. We request confirmation that the weapons are not stored in the personal homes of off-duty officers.

The purpose of these requests is to ensure the ministry is being provided with accurate information from its staff. Also, to confirm that recent developments in the past few years involving off-duty officer conduct and mental health concerns are being taken seriously by your cabinet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Casavant".

**Dr. Bryce J. Casavant** *Director of Conservation Intelligence*

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*Personal contact information redacted*