

File: 0280-30
Ref: 179903

William Harrower, RP Bio, PhD Candidate UBC
University of British Columbia
E-Mail: harrower@biodiversity.ubc.ca

Dear Mr. Harrower:

Thank you for the email from you and your colleagues, addressed to the Honourable Christy Clark, Premier, expressing your concerns regarding our government's core review of the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). As your inquiry falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, I am pleased to respond on her behalf.

The response to the amendments to the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* (ALCA) shows the enormous support all British Columbians have for good farmland in British Columbia. Since becoming Minister of Agriculture, I have worked with staff and colleagues to amend the Act based on written feedback of British Columbians and input gained from meetings with leaders in BC's agricultural sector. The amendments and Bill 24 itself passed third reading on May 29, 2014.

To address your first concern relating to the revised changes to the governance and decision-making structure of the ALC, I can assure you that the amendments will reinforce the independence of the ALC and the preservation of farmland as the primary objective of the ALC, across the whole ALR, and will provide discretion to the ALC Chair in referring matters of significance to the ALC Executive Committee. To the extent that science-based information assists with the legislated purposes of the ALC to preserve farmland, this information is not currently and has not ever been excluded from consideration by ALC panels or the Executive Committee. To be clear, the legislated purposes of the ALC are currently, and were prior to the amendments of the ALCA, the following:

- (a) to preserve agricultural land;
- (b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- (c) to encourage local governments, first nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

Regarding your second concern about the shift to divide the decision-making process regarding land classification into southern and interior zones, the intent is not to increase pressure to remove land from the ALR. The intent of these changes is to recognize regional differences within British Columbia. British Columbia is a large, diverse province with different agricultural practices, different population and development pressures and different social and cultural realities in our different regions. The changes to the ALCA recognize this fact and allow for stronger regional decision-making, which I believe supports the purpose of the ALC and future success of agriculture in BC.

While I respect and value your comments relating to your third concern about the possibility of threats to species-at-risk, my mandate is to bring forward ALR changes that will further encourage the stability of farm families and the farming industry in British Columbia. These changes must successfully balance our government's desire to protect valuable farmland while allowing for responsible economic development opportunities. To the extent that this may impact species at risk, my ministry and the ALC maintain close working relationships with the provincial and federal agencies responsible for species at risk legislation and programs, and strive to ensure that we appropriately balance the many important considerations involved in our collective land use decisions.

The Ministry of Agriculture will lead the consultation process on the regulations that will give effect to some of the Bill's most significant provisions through July and August. In addition to the regional consultation sessions, there is also a public web-based consultation process so that all British Columbians have an opportunity to give feedback on the regulations that are being developed. The website is at <http://engage.gov.bc.ca/landreserve>.

Thank you for writing and sharing your thoughts with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Norm Letnick', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Norm Letnick
Minister

cc: Honourable Christy Clark
Premier