

Thursday, August 14, 2008

Via Paddle Canada Website and email Distribution List

Canada's Navigable Waterways Need our Help!

The Canadian Federal Government, Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (SCOTIC) is considering revisions to the Navigable Waterways Protection Act (NWPA) that will have a serious impact on the future well being of our lakes and rivers.

WHAT IS THE NWPA?

The Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) is one of the oldest pieces of legislation in Canada. It ensures that, before anyone builds something on, in, through, or around the water, they must first consider the impacts on the environment and navigation, consult with the people who would be affected, and obtain a permit under the Act from the Minister of Transport.

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED CHANGES?

The Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (SCOTIC) has proposed a number of changes to the NWPA, but there are three that are particularly worrisome:

Changing the definition of "navigable" to exclude human-powered craft
Unless your boat draws a 1-metre draft, it's not considered to be significant navigation.
This also means that whitewater rapids would not be considered 'navigable'.

Excluding "minor" works - like "micro hydroelectric projects"!
Currently, "major" and "minor" works aren't separated; this new change would mean "minor" projects could go ahead without triggering a requirement for environmental assessment, making it easier for these projects to interfere with local waterways.

Deleting reference to the four named works - bridge, causeway, dam and boom.
These works are the definition of interference with navigation, and also interfere with aquatic ecosystems. What this means for paddlers is that these waterways would no longer fall under the protection of the NWPA, essentially exposing them to possible development without the requirement of an automatic environmental assessment. It also means that our traditional "right of navigation" in small watercraft (canoes, kayaks, rafts) is removed and no assessment of the impact on navigation would be required for projects on those waterways.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE CHANGES?

First of all, there's supposed to be consultation. After many complaints, SCOTIC finally invited two non-governmental groups, giving them 48 hours notice to make a presentation. One of them, Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, was able to negotiate a brief presentation via videoconference. This was the only presenter to criticize the above-mentioned amendments, and her concerns were completely ignored. These potential changes to the NWPA are harmful for many reasons -social, environmental, economic, legal. These changes would threaten navigation rights, the health of aquatic ecosystems and the ecotourism industry, as well as fishing.

PADDLE CANADA'S STANCE

The Paddle Canada Board of Directors was, in fact, extremely disappointed by the actions of Mr Ricard, Committee Clerk, who advised Paddle Canada with less than 48 hours notice (and by email no less) that we were invited to speak at the hearings.

By the time we were able to communicate with, and to solicit responses from our Board of Directors, our Federated Members Associations and our members, many paddlers were extremely upset to learn that the hearings concerning the removal of their rights from the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) had already concluded. We have been informed that the hearings for were extremely one-sided with all presenters, save one exception, arguing for the removal of our rights.

Paddle Canada truly believes that having public input is key to strengthening the protection of the future of our waterways, an important part of our environmental and heritage pillars. Our navigable waterways are magnificent treasures that should be managed with the public's input and we would encourage your to listen to the other views of our people in our great land of water too.

The bill itself will probably be tabled in the House in the fall, so we are therefore encouraging all paddlers, and other paddling, environmental and like-minded organizations to follow our example and petition the Committee for further review of this issue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Sign the Petition on the I Speak for Canadian Rivers website. Help us raise awareness about this issue and encourage your friends and family to participate in forthcoming action alerts.

For more information, please visit the I Speak for Rivers website at:
<http://www.ispeakforcanadianrivers.ca>

To further support Paddle Canada's position, and to send a strong message to our government, please write a letter to all the members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (SCOTIC) . If enough letters are received, the Committee will have no choice but to consider the public's input.

A sample letter has been included below; additional samples can be found on the I Speak for Canadian Rivers website. Feel free to make changes or to write your own letter to the Committee.

Finally, please forward this information on to other Paddlers who might be affected by this uninformed decision.

START SAMPLE LETTER

To Save or Open as a Microsoft Word document, [Click here](#)

(Date)

RE: Proposed changes to the Navigable Waterways Protection Act (NWPA)

Dear: Members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities,

In support of the Paddle Canada Board of Directors, I am writing to express my concern for the future of our Canadian Heritage Navigation Rights when travelling our Canadian waterways by canoe, sea kayak, river kayak and other small watercraft. Furthermore, I was extremely upset to learn that the hearings concerning the removal of my rights from the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) had already concluded and that all presenters at the hearings, save one, argued for the removal of my rights.

As a Canadian, I truly believe that having public input is key to strengthening the protection of the future of our waterways, an important part of our environmental and heritage pillars. Our navigable waterways are magnificent and historical treasures that should be managed with the public's input and I would encourage your to listen to the other views of our people in our great land of water too.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to not recommend the elimination of Navigation Rights for small watercraft because I believe that the right to be able to trigger an Environmental Assessment if we, the public, want one should be granted. This would ensure that all environmental, social and economic concerns are addressed before development can occur in sensitive waterway areas.

I would also like you to consider the ramifications of allowing this proposed precedent setting elimination of our rights and the message it seems to be saying: that most of our waterways could be open for development if the NWPA is rewritten to exclude the Navigation Rights for small water craft. And I assure you that this is a message that the majority of Canadians will not be pleased to hear.

Sincerely,

Your name

Address

City, Province, Postal Code

Country

Sent via email to:
SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE TRAN COMMITTEE EMAILS

- Tweed.M@parl.gc.ca
- Laframboise.M@parl.gc.ca
- Volpe.J@parl.gc.ca
- Bell.D@parl.gc.ca
- Fast.E@parl.gc.ca
- Jean.B@parl.gc.ca
- Shiple.B@parl.gc.ca
- Zed.P@parl.gc.ca
- Carrier.R@parl.gc.ca
- HallFindlay.M@parl.gc.ca
- Masse.B@parl.gc.ca
- Watson.J@parl.gc.ca

cc'd via email to:

- Paddle Canada Board of Directors
- Baird.J@parl.gc.ca John Baird (Minister of Environment)
- Cannon.L@parl.gc.ca Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transportation)
- Hearn.L@parl.gc.ca Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries & Oceans)
- OSBALDD@tc.gc.ca Dave Osbaldeston (National Manger responsible for the NWPA)

END SAMPLE LETTER
