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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Aug. 10, 2005

The Editor  
Abbotsford News

(450 words)

I support the ALC and its independence in reaching the decision it did regarding the City of Abbotsford's application ("Criticism follows ALC decision" and "ALC decision doesn't solve city's land woes," The News, Aug.4).

The ALR is the largest it has ever been in its history, with more than 4.76 million hectares set aside for farming. There is more land now protected under the Agricultural Land Reserve than ever before. Our government has added more land, removed less and increased the total by 40,000 hectares since taking office in 2001.

The previous government, which first introduced a panel-style review process for exclusion requests, allowed land to be excluded from the ALR at over twice the rate the current government did in its first three years (the most recent period for which data is available).

Your readers may be interested in reviewing the extensive statistics on the ALC's website: [www.alc.gov.bc.ca](http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca)

It's simply not true that the recent Abbotsford decision removed prime operating farmland ("178.5 hectares currently under production for cattle, raspberries, poultry, greenhouses, and nursery stock"). In fact, only a very small portion of the land is under production, as is clearly evident in the aerial photos.

Nor is it the largest exclusion in ALR history. Commission exclusion records show that there have been instances over the past three decades where large blocks of land (equal to or larger than Abbotsford) have been excluded.

As the new minister responsible for our agriculture sector, I am proud that B.C.'s fertile lands yield some of the world's highest quality agricultural and food products. We produce a greater variety of agricultural products over a wider range of geographical and climatic conditions than any other area in Canada. And I am also proud that B.C. has preserved five per cent of its total land base within the ALR, so our best agricultural lands will remain stable and secure for future food production.

The Agricultural Land Commission administers the ALR as an independent, arm's-length agency. Our government enhanced the regional panel structure of the ALC in 2002 to better balance provincial interests with community needs, so communities have greater input into what happens locally.

The Abbotsford decision was made by the South Coast panel. Appointments were coordinated through the BC Resourcing and Development Office, following established guidelines. It would be inappropriate for me to become involved in their decisions.

Since 2001, in the South Coast region, the ALC has excluded 519.7 hectares from the ALR, rejected applications for another 416.8 ha and has added 35.9 ha.

Clearly, the ALC is successfully working with local governments, communities and farmers to preserve our farmland and encourage farming while considering community interests.

Pat Bell  
Minister of Agriculture and Lands