



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT BY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS RESOLVED

Victoria—The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (“OIPC”), in an investigation report released today, confirmed that a complaint made by the University of Victoria Environmental Law Clinic (“Clinic”) under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (“Act”) has been resolved with the OIPC’s assistance.

The Clinic, representing a consortium of environmental organizations including the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Raincoast Conservation Society, alleged that three ministries engaged in a system-wide pattern of routine delays, excessive and unreasonable fees and frequent and unjustified denials of fee waivers in response to freedom of information requests.

The OIPC focused its investigation on the Ministry of Environment (“MOE”). It examined statistics on the processing of access requests made by these groups by MOE. While the reliability and completeness of the data supplied by MOE were open to question, the OIPC concluded that there appeared to be a “significant problem” with the processing of requests made by the eight complainants. The investigation revealed that MOE was taking on average 74 business days to process requests for information from the group as opposed to a cross-government average for the same time period of 45 business days. The Act requires public bodies to respond to access requests within 30 business days.

During the investigation, the complainants and MOE met face-to-face to resolve the issues. This resulted in a plan, developed with the OIPC’s assistance, in which MOE agreed to a strategy to improve processing of access requests. The strategy included restructuring job functions to better focus on the processing of requests, utilizing better tracking technology to monitor request processing, improving internal messaging around the importance of access to information, agreeing to monitor response times and a commitment to ongoing communication with the complainants. The OIPC also recommends that the MOE publicly report on response times.

“I am pleased the parties collaborated in an effective resolution of the issues without further intervention by my office,” Information and Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis stated. “Cooperative resolution of complaints is an effective tool that also enhances goodwill between stakeholder groups and Ministries.”

Investigation Report F08-01:

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/orders/investigation_reports/InvestigationReportF08-01.pdf

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