

SOUTH ISLAND SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION

Community Groups Call for Independent Review of Mega-yacht Marina

For immediate release

September 21, 2009

Community, environmental, and paddling groups are calling on Ottawa today to hand over the environmental assessment of the proposed Victoria Harbour mega-yacht Marina to an independent Review Panel for public hearings.

"This proposal threatens Victoria Harbour -- the heart of our city. Yet the current process gives citizens only one hour to voice their concerns directly to government decision-makers. That's simply not good enough," said Irene Faulkner, lawyer for South Island Sea Kayakers Association (SISKA), as she delivered legal submissions to Minister of Environment Jim Prentice. The submissions argue that the current closed-door, government-run assessment process must be replaced by full hearings before an independent, unbiased Review Panel.

Faulkner criticized the current process, which allows the public only one hour to express concerns at a public event where decision-makers are present - at the September 22 public meeting on the project.

"Today we presented documented evidence that the Marina could imperil seaplanes and put wildlife at risk. It could jeopardize paddlers' safety, interfere with their ancient right to use public waters, and undermine one of North America's best urban paddling areas. In addition, it could destroy some of Canada's most iconic urban viewsapes. Yet this project is undergoing the least rigorous level of assessment under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*," continued Faulkner.

"Under the current process, the public has not had its concerns seriously addressed. It has not been given the opportunity to test the proponent's claims, to cross-examine his experts, and to bring its own experts forward to testify. In addition, serious concerns have been raised about whether government has done due diligence and is conducting an unbiased assessment of this project," stated Faulkner.

The Minister has statutory discretion to refer an assessment to a Review Panel if a project has raised public concern. "This project has raised unprecedented public concern. Over 7000 people have signed a petition against the proposal, and three former mayors, the current mayor and two local Members of Parliament have expressed serious concerns about the project," pointed out Faulkner. "Those concerned include citizens from across the political spectrum."

Organizations that support the legal submission include a wide range of stake-holders including: Victoria Harbour Ferry Company, Ocean River Sports, Sierra Club of BC, Victoria Canoe & Kayak Club, Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society, Pacifica Paddle Sports, Dogwood Initiative, Aloha Paddlers, Island Transformations.Org, West Bay Residents' Association, Victoria West Community Association, Save Victoria Harbour Coalition, Veins of Life Watershed Society, Group of Former Mayors of Victoria, Victoria Harbour Defence Alliance, Wilderness Committee, and Saanich Inlet Protection Society.

Green Party national leader Elizabeth May and local Members of Parliament Denise Savoie and Keith Martin have agreed to personally present the legal submissions and concerns to Minister Prentice and Minister of Transport, John Baird.

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Note: West Coast Environmental Law Association provided legal counsel for this matter, and UVic Environmental Law Centre helped prepare the legal submission, which can be found at www.elc.uvic.ca