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Environmental lawyers: new *Clean Energy Act* has potential to ensure responsible planning for renewable electricity

But BC must work with British Columbians to refine its approach if this potential is to be met

Vancouver. Integrated resource planning to meet BC's energy objectives must also address broader environmental and social impacts if we are serious about responsible renewable electricity development in BC, says West Coast Environmental Law in response to Bill 17 – the *Clean Energy Act* introduced by the BC Government yesterday.

The *Clean Energy Act* bill sets out high level requirements for a new provincial-scale “Integrated Resource Plan” for the development of renewable power generation, conservation, and demand-reduction measures to ensure energy self-sufficiency and meet other energy objectives. This new requirement appears to echo last December's recommendations from 26 conservation groups including West Coast Environmental Law, which called on the BC government to create a province-wide plan for renewable electricity to maximize the public benefits from new generation while having the lowest possible negative environmental and social impacts, but stops short of addressing some of the most controversial issues.

“The new Act establishes a toolbox for provincial renewable electricity planning, but stops short of including all the right tools.” said Josh Paterson, staff lawyer at West Coast Environmental Law. “We hope to work with the government to design a credible planning process that looks carefully at the environmental impacts of renewable development, and balances those with the need for clean electricity and the imperative of reducing reliance on greenhouse gas emitting energy.”

The goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, energy conservation, fostering technological development, and job creation are sensibly laid out in the Act as considerations for renewable electricity planning. However, Paterson added that the Act, which has not yet been passed, does not require the Integrated Resource Plan to consider placing limitations on new power projects to address anticipated environmental or social impacts such as the effects on water flows, fish, and wildlife or on areas of high conservation value outside of existing protected areas. The government needs to ensure that environmental impacts are a key consideration in the planning process, along with all the other considerations.

“The government needs to engage deeply, and quickly, with First Nations governments, stakeholders and communities to develop the proposals that are contained in the Act,” stated Jessica Clogg, Executive Director and Senior Counsel of West Coast Environmental Law. “If renewable electricity planning is done in an inclusive, transparent and comprehensive way, there will be much greater public buy-in and better decisions will be made.”

Clogg also noted that the 26 conservation groups' recommendations called on the BC government to conduct regional assessments of the cumulative, spin-off environmental effects of electricity projects (such as the impacts of additional resource extraction projects that could be made possible by an increase in local electricity supply, or the combined impacts of many generation projects in a single area).

“While the Act says that cumulative impacts might be considered in environmental assessments of renewable electricity projects, it doesn't require them to be considered, Clogg added. “We hope that the government will set a clear direction that cumulative, spin-off environmental effects must be considered in determining where projects are appropriate at all, and in the environmental assessment of new generation projects.”

The Act requires the Integrated Resource Plan to consider “suitable opportunities” to export electricity, with the objective of BC being a net exporter of electricity in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in jurisdictions that purchase BC's power. The public needs to have the opportunity, as part of the planning consultations, to have a meaningful dialogue about what terms and conditions should be set to ensure that if exports happen at all, they will occur only where they result in meaningful reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the importing jurisdiction.