

National Events (Oct 2015 and Onwards)

2023

September

- As reported in the [Globe and Mail](#) the federal government rejected a plan to reform Canada's ailing access to information regime, and instead, against the advice of bureaucrats, embarked on a limited internal review that produced no substantive change.

January

- [According](#) to The Narwhal, a recent Fisheries and Oceans Canada [report](#) that concludes sea lice infestations on salmon farms are not significantly affecting wild Pacific salmon, raises the question of industry bias by DFO again. Independent scientists have questioned the scientific integrity of the study in their [letter](#) to the Minister and asked that the full data set be made available for independent analysis.

2022

May

- At a parliamentary [hearing](#), serious concerns have been raised about the failure of DFO (Fisheries and Oceans Canada) to properly use science to inform its Minister and to communicate with the public about the risks of salmon aquaculture. Critics state that risk assessments regarding the harm to wild salmon from sea lice and other health risks spread by salmon farms are inadequate, and that key relevant scientific studies (including some FDO research)

are not being given due attention. Thus, information on the potential major cumulative impact (including the risk of extinction) of open-net salmon farming on certain B.C. wild salmon populations is being suppressed.

January

- In a recent [assessment](#) of the degree of transparency of evidence underlying 100 federal government policies, Evidence for Democracy (E4D) concluded that transparency was low, thus highlighting concerns about the public's ability to find the evidence behind such government policy-making.

2021

December

- Over one hundred organizations have expressed [concerns](#) about imminent regulatory changes by which the federal government will transfer responsibility for determining the safety of certain new genetically edited food products to biotech companies, and make the “transparency” of such determinations a voluntary matter. A March 2022 [report](#) by Cban (Canadian Biotechnology Action Network) and Testbiotech (Institute for Independent Biotechnology Assessment) details the risks of new genome editing techniques and recommends precautionary regulation.

May

- An access to information request has [revealed](#) that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO's) Assistant Deputy Minister's office edited a scientific report intended to inform the DFO's decision on whether to list specified species for protection under the Species at Risk Act. The scientists' reported concerns about the serious population decline of two steelhead species in B.C.; whereas, the altered report downplayed the risks to the steelhead, and in July 2019 the DFO decided not to list the two species under the Species at Risk Act. The Canada Science Advisory Secretariat had "warned the changed document was undermining the scientific credibility of the process". Even prior to publication of the altered report, the B.C. government had expressed concerns that DFO was ignoring the science.

2020

October

- An investigative report by the Globe and Mail revealed systemic [racism](#) in the algorithms used to calculate risk assessments for federal inmates. These affect access to programs and decisions about probation and release.
- Given the erosion of trust in science and the rise of pseudoscience, the University of Alberta is offering a new free online [course](#) in science literacy which can be completed in 25 to 35 hours of self study.
- The government of Canada has [reappointed](#) Dr, Mona Nemer as Chief Science Advisor for a two year term. The office has published its second annual report covering the period from January 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020.

- An 86 page report by Fisheries and Oceans Canada Centre for Science Advice has identified serious [flaws](#) in the impact assessment process carried out for proposed offshore oil and gas development in Newfoundland and Labrador, pointing out specific errors and omissions and a failure to follow reliable scientific advice. The federal government subsequently committed \$320 million to support the industry. In May, a legal [challenge](#) of the flawed Regional Assessment process, and of the government's intention to exempt oil exploration from the requirements of the new *Impact Assessment Act*, was commenced.
- Environmental groups have filed a legal [challenge](#) to Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency's approach to pesticide regulation, describing the Agency's decision to re-register the pesticide glyphosate as failing to apply the Precautionary Principle, and demonstrating a lack of scientific integrity and a breach of the public participation process.

September

- Canada's Health Minister has ordered an independent [review](#) of the Global Public Health Intelligence Network in response to internal complaints by some scientists and analysts about senior staff failing to properly address early warnings about COVID-19, and about work reassignments leading to a partial shutdown of the alert system.

April

- An [article](#) by Canadian academics outlines ways to strengthen the role of science in policy-making in Canada including increasing public engagement training for scientists, and “developing incentives for policy engagement for researchers”.
- Article outlining that the Trudeau government relies on expert scientists in dealing with Covid19 outbreak, but fails to do so concerning the [environmental crisis](#).

February

- Canada’s Office of the Chief Science Advisor publishes a [Roadmap](#) for Open Science.

2019

November

- A [retrospective](#) on the Connaught Lab deplores its sale in the 1980s and looks at the consequences today.
- The Trudeau government’s announcement of a new cabinet [eliminated](#) the position of federal science minister, raising questions about what that means for the Canadian science community, and whether science will get as much [attention](#) as it shifts to the portfolio of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry.

October

- A Toronto Star [editorial](#) calls for the enforcement of a requirement that grant recipients make their work public by archiving their papers on an open-access repository within a year of it being published in a paywalled journal.

September

- On September 4th, the federal government's "[Policy](#) on Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge Integrity" took effect as part of the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada's mandate. Commitments include ensuring that "Indigenous Knowledge will be given due consideration alongside science in decision-making, and will be used to the benefit of Indigenous people and communities", and that "departmental science and research activities will occur with the participation of and to the benefit of indigenous people and communities".

August

- Elections Canada, in the run-up to the October 2019 federal [election](#) in Canada, warned charities wanting to discuss the dangers of climate change that this could be deemed a partisan activity because Maxime Bernier, the leader of the People's Party of Canada, had expressed doubts about the legitimacy of climate change.

June

- The President of the Royal Society of Canada noted that internationally [trust](#) in science can no longer be taken for granted. In response, the Science Academies of the G7 countries released a [statement](#) on how to deal with this issue.
- The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (= the union of the government scientists) negotiated in their new contract a renewal of the scientific [integrity](#) clause, which guarantees the right of government scientists to speak to the media for another 4 years.
- A number of groups question the scientific integrity of the international consortium that oversees the Chalk River Nuclear Waste facility in an [open letter](#) to the Prime Minister, Parliament and the federal government.

April

- Access (granted in 2019 after years of delay) to an internal 2014 memo by the then deputy environment minister and to other government information of the time, highlights [concern](#) by public scientists about the need to take further action on the Copenhagen Accord commitment and raises questions about the Harper government's commitment to climate change action.
- A public services and government information librarian engages in "guerilla archiving", saving all [data](#) and information hosted on the Government of Alberta web pages before it is turned over from the NDP to the UCP.

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February

- The federal government has taken necessary steps to [amend](#) the *Income Tax Act* ; and will not appeal a precedent-setting court decision(July 16, 2018) in favour of *Canada Without Poverty*, which determined that non-partisan political activities are part of [charitable](#) activities and thus should be protected from special federal tax audits (established in 2012 to review political activities of charities).

2018

December

- Advocacy charities (e.g. environmental, human rights) that faced self-censorship for fear of losing charitable status resulting from targeted CRA auditing under a special program set up in 2012, have had their freedom of expression upheld and can use their scientific research to engage in non-partisan “public policy dialogue and development activities” without risk. The federal government has taken necessary steps

to [amend](#) the *Income Tax Act*; and will not appeal a precedent-setting court decision(July 16, 2018) in favour of *Canada Without Poverty*, which determined that non-partisan political activities are part of [charitable](#) activities and thus should be protected from special federal tax audits.

- The Royal Society of Canada released a [position paper](#) The Next Steps for Sustainable Science Advice in Canada which highlights the urgency of closing the gap between government decision-making and external science. Key recommendations involve passing legislation to strengthen the role of Canada's Chief Science Advisor and to create a science and technology advisory committee.

November

- Environmental and health safety groups request that Health Canada cancel its 2017 decision to renew the approval of glyphosate and set up an independent review panel on [glyphosate](#), amid fears that misleading or tainted studies by Monsanto were considered in the Pest Management Regulatory Agency's process for re-evaluating glyphosate.

October

- An investigation by The Narwhal into the relationship between Parks Canada and the media, [reports](#) that freedom-of-information issues continue to be a concern. Environmental journalists have encountered difficulties in their attempts to speak with Parks Canada scientists,

notably, long wait times, prior approval of interview questions, and denial of access to field operations. Interim CEO of Parks Canada, Michael Nadler, [denies there is a problem](#).

July

- Canada's Science Advisor Dr. Nemer discusses Ottawa's new [science integrity](#) policy which is expected to be in place in federal departments and agencies by the end of the year. However, it does not have the force of law, or of signed contracts.
- [Analysis](#) of effects of cutting scientific capacity through outsourcing, called "Professional Reliance", and its disastrous effects in BC and Canada.
- [Review](#) of Science Advisors in Ontario, Canada, UK, USA, New Zealand.
- The federal government has released a scientific integrity policy [model](#) to protect federal scientists and researchers. The guidelines can be used by federal departments and agencies in developing their own policies by the year end deadline.
- A published [report](#) elaborating on concerns by scientists about years of severe decline of and risks to two populations of steelhead trout in B.C., was later learned (see May, 2021) to have been altered by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

April

- The Council of Canadian Academies has released a series of [reports](#) that document that while Canada remains a

leading global contributor to research, and is making important contributions across a wide range of fields, its investment in R&D has decreased, and its international standing and capacity is sliding.

- Our Right to Know helped coordinate the March for Science 2018 in Toronto

March

- In response to Legault's report, the Science Advisor, Dr. Nemer, wants to [train](#) public servants so they can learn how to properly use evidence in their decisions and policies.
- Canada is [profiting](#) from a "brain gain" because of Trump in the USA and Brexit in Great Britain.

February

- A [survey](#) commissioned by the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada found that in spite of Trudeau's commitment to unmuzzle scientists, 53% of them said that they still could not speak freely, 73% said that if they spoke out about a departmental decision that, based on their scientific knowledge, could bring harm to the public interest, they would not be able to do so without fear of censorship or retaliation, and 20% said that they had received a request for information from the public within their area of expertise that they were prevented from answering.
- 5 years after receiving a complaint about the muzzling of scientist, the then Information Commissioner of Canada, Suzanne Legault, sent her [report](#) to the complainant. She

found that while the information policies did not change under Harper, their application were not followed. She then made 4 recommendations to deal with the lingering effects to the President of the Treasury Board. The Treasury Board did not commit itself to implement these recommendations. Several politicians [commented](#) on this report.

2017

December

- The [Statistics Act](#) is amended to strengthen Statistic Canada's independence.

October

- After a long [history](#) of concern over potential for conflict-of-interest between the B.C. salmon farming industry and the B.C. government's Animal Health Centre, the NDP government announces an [investigation](#) into provincial salmon aquaculture research.
- The federal Environment Commissioner Julie Gelfand [found](#) that "The federal government is not prepared to deal with the impacts of climate change". Only five of the 19 departments she looked at had even figured out where the risks are from climate change, let alone how best to deal with them. It means that science-based evidence is not being applied as the policy base.

September

- A UNESCO [report](#) noted a steep decline in Gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) in Canada between 2001 and 2013, in contrast to other OECD countries, where the GERD/GDP ratio climbed back to 2008 levels. The number of R&D workers in industry and governments shrunk. The report concludes: “If the country is serious about reinvigorating its knowledge culture and positioning itself as a world leader via STI, a more concerted and co-ordinated national effort will be required with demonstrated leadership from all stakeholders.” (p. 126) These figures reflect the cuts during the Harper government. Since that time, there has been some re-investment in basic science.
- The government announces the appointment of Dr. [Mona Nemer](#) as Chief Science Advisor for Canada.

August

- The Liberal government still has [no plans](#) to reopen two ozonesonde launch sites that were closed in 2012 despite being among scientific recommendations made in 2015 by Environment and Climate Change Canada’s senior research scientist David Tarasick and his colleagues. According to Tarasick, restarting one site is crucial to important ozone and climate change research due to its unique location.

June

- A Global Young Academy [report](#) discloses a sharp decline in the number of Canadian scientists doing fundamental research from 2006 to 2015, and provides related information on Canada's decline in GERD (gross domestic expenditures on R&D as a percent of GDP) from 2005 to 2014, indicating that investment in basic research [declined](#) by 19% leaving Canada in 20th place among the 34 OECD countries.

April

- The federal government provides a \$328-million [top-up](#) to Canada's largest and most unique science labs and initiatives.
- The Science Minister-appointed panel files a final [report](#) recommending an increase in federal annual funding for fundamental science research to \$4.8 billion and to create an independent National Advisory Council on Research and Innovation.
- Evidence for Democracy releases [report](#) report on Oversight at Risk. The state of government science in British Columbia.

March

- The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada negotiated a precedent setting collective [agreement](#) that enshrines scientists' right to speak publicly about science and research.
- The Federal Science Library creates [a new web portal](#) that allows Canadians and researchers everywhere to search

multiple government science library collections and repositories from a single place.

February

- Using an analysis of Twitter feeds, it turns out that [science](#) was an important factor in the 2015 federal election.

January

- Canadian scientists offer [support](#) to US scientists who suffer fate similar to that of Canadian scientists under Harper.

2016

November

- More than a year after the Trudeau administration officially unmuzzled thousands of federal scientists, barriers to federal science still exist for journalists in the form of communications departments. In November, a communications advisor for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency [declined](#) to provide National Observer with access to a federal scientist who worked on the Pacific NorthWest LNG project, approved by the federal government in September.
- A senior energy strategist for Greenpeace Canada expressed [dismay](#) after walking out of a meeting with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission(CNSC) at which he

was prevented from presenting his analysis of serious safety issues raised in an open [letter](#) sent to the CNSC by a group of whistleblowers. The letter, which had previously been ridiculed by the CNSC, itemized major safety risks at Canada's nuclear facilities and criticized the CNSC's failure to disclose information about safety risks to the public.

June

- [The federal government](#) has named [an expert panel](#) to conduct an unprecedented and sweeping review of how it supports university-based scientific research.

April

- In its first [budget](#), the liberal government increased total funding for research by \$141 million in 2016-2017. While welcomed, it falls short of bringing Canada's spending on research in line with that of other highly developed countries. (ME 2016-05-18)
- Introduced on June 18th, 2015 by Elizabeth May, Member of Parliament and Leader of the Green Party of Canada, Bill C-259: An Act to amend the Access to Information Act (scientific research), also known as the [Open Science Act](#), is now undergoing first reading in the House of Commons. This bill will require all federal departments to make all publicly funded scientific research available to Canadians on their websites. (WL 04/14/2016)
- The government is still [censoring](#) access of to a wide range of websites in certain departments, according to the union of government scientists (PIPSC).

March

- The release of [internal documents](#) obtained through the access to information process revealed warnings by senior federal civil servants about the potential harm of granting government scientists unfettered freedom to speak publicly. In response to questions from the media, Treasury Board President Scott Brison emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring that government decisions are informed by the research of its scientists, and to ensuring that the public has access to such information.

2015

November

- [Kirsty Duncan](#) appointed Minister of Science
- Following the Liberal government's removal of restrictions imposed by the previous federal government on the ability of government scientists to speak openly about their research, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is the first department to [allow its scientists to talk openly](#) to the media, followed closely thereafter by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

- The [Mandate Letter](#) of the Minister of Science specifies among other things: Create a Chief Science Officer mandated to ensure that government science is fully available to the public. Support your colleagues in the review and reform of Canada's environmental assessment processes to ensure that environmental assessment decisions are based on science, facts, and evidence. Support Ministerial colleagues as they re-insert scientific considerations into the heart of their decision-making and investment choices. Lead the establishment of new Canada Research Chairs in sustainable technologies. Examine options to strengthen the recognition of, and support for, fundamental research to support new discoveries.
- The [Mandate Letter](#) of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development specifies, among other things: Restore the long-form census and update legislation governing Statistics Canada to reinforce the institution's independence. Improve the quality of publicly available data in Canada. Support the Minister of Science in establishing new Canada Research Chairs in sustainable technologies.
- [Navdeep Bains](#) appointed Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development
- The new Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Navdeep Bains, states that [scientists will be unmuzzled](#) and treated with respect
- The Liberal government has announced that it will reinstate the mandatory [long-form census](#) in 2016.

October

- The Liberal Party of Canada, lead by Mr. Justin Trudeau, wins a majority in the federal elections. The new

government of Canada brings hope that public science and public knowledge will once again be supported.

- Message and media [control](#) have become deeply embedded in the government, and Mr. Trudeau needs to send a clear and forceful signal to bureaucrats that their days of interfering with the flow of information to the public are over.
- CAUT sponsors a national campaign [campaign](#) “Get Science Right” to speak out against muzzling of scientists.
- Four Canadian scientists were interviewed by [VICE](#) on what they think about the Liberal victory and how the new government can go about improving science in Canada.