



### Our Times

It seems strange to be sitting here writing my editorial musings - so much has happened since the spring edition of BioNews. I find myself questioning my role as a Canadian, as a scientist, as a professional. Without any question, the last few months have been troubling times for me. Let me start my musings by relating a short vignette.

### To Be a Canadian ...

Our research vessel flies a Canadian flag. We have proudly done so for a number of years. This leads to an annual ritual. Each winter, the fierce northern storm winds worry our Canadian flag into tatters. Each spring, we buy a new flag to replace the old one, thus keeping our vessel looking primly Canadian. This year, during our regular painting and maintenance, I took down the flag pole with the old flag, thinking to put the new flag up shortly. However, our work was interrupted with a trip to Nelson to attend the APB conference, and it was some time before I got back to working on flag replacement. Finally, my partner and I were back on the ship and had the new flag, carefully folded and packaged in plastic, in our hands. There was an odd pause, like we were both hesitant to get on with the job. I asked, "Do you want to put up the flag this year?" And my partner responded, "I'm not feeling very proud to be a Canadian right now." Neither was I.

In the end, the flag did get put up in its place of honor, but the feeling certainly wasn't the same as it had been in past years.

### So Many Questions ...

I would like to share with you some of the questions that are troubling me. I'm not going to suggest any answers. We are all highly trained professionals, and I think we can all research these questions to our own satisfaction. But I would like us all to take a moment of our time and ponder the answers that we have found - how they affect us, our families, our profession, our clients, and the environment of which we are stewards.

### Our Democracy ...

There are currently legal actions in seven ridings across Canada to contest election results on the grounds that there were irregularities, fraud or corrupt or illegal practices that affected the result of the election. Disturbing evidence has been uncovered which does indeed suggest that some level of voter misdirection may have occurred, if not clearly indicating by whom. Should we, as Canadians, be concerned about possible threats to our right to democracy? Shouldn't we investigate allegations of election fraud, and carry out legal actions against those found guilty of this crime, regardless of who they are?

Our federal government is currently voting on an omnibus bill, Bill-C38, which contains amendments to approximately 70 laws affecting a wide range of activities in Canada. Is it democratic that the current elected government of the day can change so many laws with so little time for consultation, debate, and research on the impacts and outcomes of such changes?

### Our Independence ...

As increases in population drive increases in demand for resources, there is more and more pressure for large industrial resource extraction to take place. We, as biology professionals, often find ourselves balancing on the fine line between the demand for greater resource extraction at the expense of the environment and the need to steward rapidly declining species, populations, and ecosystems. This is further complicated by the fact that we are being paid by the client, and our personal livelihood is often impacted by the decisions we make. How do we find and maintain our scientific and professional independence and integrity in such high pressure situations?

### Our Resources ...

Have we done a thorough cost-benefit analysis with respect to how we extract our resources and what we do with them? Is the money generated by the sale of raw resources, such as logs and bitumen, worth the costs of environmental damage and the loss of processing jobs to Canadians?

### Our World ...

We live in a world where globalization is touted as the solution to all problems, but is it really? We can go to the store and buy cherries from South America and computers from China, but what will this start to look like when oil becomes limiting and the costs of shipping products from around the world to Canada skyrockets? Is this the world we want to live in? Or should we start considering localization as an option?

I want to be proud to be a Canadian, but I am beginning to realize that how I answer these questions, and how I act upon my answers, is going to change the meaning of what it is to be Canadian. These are the changes of our times, and it will be up to us to respond to them.

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