

Media backgrounder to support BCFSN news release Regarding Bill 24 to amend ALC Act, 27 March 2014

Betrayal of a public trust

- British Columbians support protection of farmland
 - 61% of British Columbians believe there are no acceptable reasons for removing land from the ALR (Sept 2008, [Ipsos Reid poll](#))
 - 95% of those with knowledge of the ALR support it (Dec 2008, [Ipsos Reid poll](#)): up from 91% in 2004
- Public consultation has not occurred, and is required
 - Land and water are both essential prerequisites for food and survival; there was thorough public consultation before introduction of the Water Sustainability Act – why not now?
 - The only opportunity for input regarding the Core Review was before it had made any decisions
 - At that time “plenty of opportunities” were promised by the Dan Ashton, Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services who is also the Vice-Chair of the Cabinet Working Group on Core Review ([Hansard](#) Sep 26, 2013 page 249) – none provided
 - Government has told some interested parties what it intends to do and has ignored others completely, including the Agricultural Land Commission itself: this is not consultation
- Unforeseen change in direction post May 2013 election
 - ALR/ALC reform was not part of the Christy Clark Liberals’ election platform
 - The ALC had been reviewed twice in 2010, first by the [Auditor General](#) and then [internally](#), and was set on a course to be more proactive
 - Mandate letters to the ministers in June 2013 indicated that the new government thought this was not enough, signalling an unspecified change in direction
 - No evidence that the Commission has lacked effectiveness to date - it has been doing everything expected of it and complying fully with the 2010 recommendations – it has been ignored by government since summer 2013 and its Chair has been posting progress reports [here](#)

Two areas with different management = putting 90% of the ALR up for grabs

- Not specific about where the zones are but here is the breakdown government ministers and the Premier have repeatedly mentioned:
 - The Okanagan (5%), Fraser Valley (3%) and Vancouver Island (2%) account for a total of 10% of the ALR in BC
 - Two areas with different management means the rest - 90% of the lands in the ALR - are in danger of being lost to food production
 - Almost half (49%) of ALR lands are in the north: this includes 72% of the Class 1-4 lands with the best soils in the province, which, in a context of climate change, may be most needed for future farmers
 - This [graphic](#) gives you a picture of the two areas on a map
- Six regional panels can be responsive to local needs – question what level of integration there will be for the province as a whole and what attention, if any, will be given to BC’s overall food security potential

Role of the ALR/ALC: safeguarding our food future

- Less than 5% of BC’s land base has capability for agriculture
- Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) was formed in 1972 based on objective biophysical characteristics
- Powers and mandate of its manager, the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) were carefully designed to put agriculture first – see how it was built [here](#) to give you a better idea of what is being taken apart
- Pro and anti ALR are at root an argument about public vs private rights – the views of this government align with the report on the ALR produced by the [Fraser Institute](#) in October 2009 which recommends getting rid of the ALR as a “failed experiment.” we deconstructed those arguments in a report we

posted [here](#) – it is fair and appropriate (and in Canada is perfectly legal) to take zoning measures to protect food for agriculture in the public interest

- ALR in 1973 totalled 4.7 million ha, today is 4.6 million ha but transfers have occurred south to north with some overall decline in land quality, statistics broken out [here](#)
- ALR slowed farmland losses from 6,000 ha per year in 1972 to average 610 ha per year since then
- Climate change and global pressures on farmlands make need for BC's ALR greater today than everⁱ
- Most applications to the ALC (95%) are from landowners, developers or speculators, not farmers or people who want to farm

“It’s not farmland without farmers”

- Agri-food is in BC's top three industries, number one if you include food service
- The ALR benefits farming in some ways, such as by keeping taxes low, and hampers farming in some other ways, such as by restricting farm-related business activities on farms
- **Blaming the ALR/ALC for not “making farming viable” does not recognize the ALC's primary job (protect capability), avoids responsibility of government to attend to agriculture in the public interest**
- **The provincial share of the Ministry of Agriculture's budget in 2011-12 was disappointingly low (p 158 of [federal report](#) here) reflecting long-term trend of reduction in programs, extension personnel)**

ALR, ALC critically important for regional and local land use planning

- ALR functions as an urban containment boundary and a key piece of green infrastructure – useful resource materials from SmartGrowth BC are posted [here](#) including its [ALR position statement](#)
- ALR has kept farmland prices within the reach of farmers and ranchers: in the last five years, farmland values in BC have increased 5% versus 38% for Alberta, and 63% for Canada as a whole, Farm Credit Canada references [here](#)
- **Agricultural Land Commission's working relationships with local and regional governments and the Oil and Gas Commission generally function well and are discussed in the ALC Chair's [March 2014 report](#) – local governments have not taken advantage of delegation agreements that give them more responsibility for land use decision making**

Agriculture is an important and sustainable contributor to BC's economy

- In 2012, BC's agriculture, fisheries and processing sectors provided almost 62,000 jobs and \$11.7 billion in annual revenue, data [here](#)
- Some areas, like direct sales to consumers, have grown by 147% in just over five years (from \$46 million to \$113 million between 2006 and 2012): BC Association of Farmers Markets' data [here](#)
- There is a growing movement nationally (e.g. [FarmStart](#)) and provincially (e.g. [BC Young Farmers](#)) of young and beginning farmers whose main challenge is to access affordable farmland

Who we are

The [BC Food Systems Network](#) includes thousands of members in over 20 organizations representing farmers, food producers, health promoters, and community food organizations around British Columbia who are concerned with farming and food security in the province. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

ⁱ Global trends

- Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions: Strengthening BC's Agriculture Sector in the Face of Climate Challenge http://pics.uvic.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Strengthening%20BC's%20Agriculture%20Sector_0.pdf
- Welcome to Dystopia: Entering a long-term and politically dangerous food crisis, Jeremy Grantham <http://f2cfnd.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/GMOQ2Letter.pdf>
- UN Conference on Trade and Development Report, 2013 http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/trdr2013_en.pdf
- Climate change draft report predicts war, heat waves, starvation <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/climate-change-draft-report-predicts-war-heat-waves-starvation-1.2350352>