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NEWS

Portside Review Contradicted

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An environmental-assessment report commissioned by the developer of the massive Portside convention-centre project has been partially contradicted by an environmental review panel, according to documents obtained by the *Georgia Straight*.

Greystone Properties Ltd., which plans to extend Canada Place 173 metres farther into Burrard Inlet, hired Vancouver-based Hemmera Resource Consultants Ltd. to prepare an environmental study in May. The report found that although the development would affect the wildlife in the area, the impact would be "minor" and "compensated" for by Greystone.

But the Hemmera report was then reviewed by the Burrard Environmental Review Committee, a broad-based Portside approving agency with some members drawn from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the federal and provincial environment ministries. BEREC disagreed with some of the Hemmera report's claims, as it noted in a May 15 letter to the Vancouver Port Corporation, a letter obtained by the *Straight* with a freedom-of-information request.

"The present design for the convention centre facility would adversely impact a large area of what is presently productive fish habitat that is utilized by large numbers of fish, including species of recreational and commercial significance such as Pacific salmon, herring, smelt, sea perch, and Dungeness crabs..." the BEREC letter stated. "It should be noted that

BEREC does not accept the statement that the offshore seabed supports very little marine life."

In fact, Hemmera claimed in its report that new invertebrate communities will collect on Portside's pilings and underwater rock berm, which would "increase the diversity and abundance of marine life". In turn, the report noted, fish and shrimp would be attracted to the pier for food and cover. Hemmera also stated that harbour seals might even be attracted to the area by disturbed and escaping fish when the piles are being driven and that diving ducks might come to eat the blue mussels on the new pier. The report also mentioned that seagulls in the project area didn't seem to be the most ambitious bird species. "Most gulls in the study area were loafing," it noted, "although opportunistic feeding was observed when food became available." Port corporation environmental coordinator Darrell Desjardin explained that *loafing* is an ornithological term for the birds "basically standing around and not doing anything".

Hemmera did note that BEREC has found as many as 600 birds of various species in the Portside area at seasonal population peaks. These included diving ducks, grebes, loons, cormorants, belted kingfishers, shore birds, and gulls. Noise and marine-traffic impacts on the migratory and resident birds would be "minor", the Hemmera report claimed, although it admitted that some birds would abandon the area while other predatory birds would catch fewer fish because of the muddied waters.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a policy of "no net

loss", whereby any marine habitat removed must be replaced in another form. As a result of DFO advice, Greystone reduced its planned Canada Place landfill area from more than four hectares to less than a half-hectare. The pier extension for a third cruise-ship berth and related facilities will sit on 200 steel piles driven down to bedrock, which will have a "low impact activity" on fish, according to Greystone's consultants.

"The DFO policy of 'no net loss' hasn't succeeded," Ivan Bulic, coordinator of the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation, told the *Straight*. "You used to be able to eat fish from Burrard Inlet," he added, "but a study in the mid-1980s found fish with cancerous lesions there, and there's been no follow-up studies by the federal government since then."

The Hemmera report found concentrations of copper, iron, zinc, and chromium above federal and provincial standards for soil and ground water. BEREC wrote that Hemmera's "proposed sediment sampling and analysis plan does not address the potential of groundwater contamination to adversely impact compensatory habitat, and fish utilizing the area."

Desjardin told the *Straight* that BEREC's sampling concerns have since been addressed and that Greystone plans to dredge and remove the polluted soil.

On December 8, Vancouver city council will hold a public-review meeting on the draft comprehensive development agreement, but will not give the final go-ahead until BEREC provides a letter of approval, expected early in 1999. ■