

AEL Advocacy Action Brief

Say No to the Federal Government's Proposal to Create Special Economic Zones and Exempt Developments from Species-at-Risk Protections

 **Deadline to Submit Comments: July 22, 2026**

 Send Comments to: engagement@pco-bcp.gc.ca

This document is for your information. Please don't share it publicly.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

On May 8, 2026, the federal Government of Canada released a [Discussion Paper](#) proposing major changes to how large infrastructure and industrial projects are approved in Canada.


The proposal would create **"Federal Economic Zones"** for projects considered to be in the "national interest," including: transportation corridors, energy and transmission projects, telecommunications infrastructure, and industrial development zones. Projects inside these zones could receive faster approvals and exemptions from existing environmental protections and oversight processes.

The government is also considering weakening protections under the **Species at Risk Act (SARA)** — including allowing Cabinet to exempt projects from the law's "jeopardy test," which is designed to prevent projects that could threaten the survival or recovery of endangered species and their critical habitat.

Canada already has approximately **600 species listed under SARA** and thousands more species considered at risk of extinction. These proposed changes could significantly weaken environmental protections and accelerate biodiversity loss.

We Need Your Voice!

The federal government is currently seeking public feedback on these proposed changes, and your input matters.

 The deadline to submit comments is **July 22, 2026**.

 Send your feedback to: engagement@pco-bcp.gc.ca

KEY CONCERNS & TALKING POINTS

👉 Choose the points that resonate with you and put them in your own words for maximum impact!

1 Weakening Protections for Endangered Species

- The proposal would allow Cabinet to exempt projects from the *Species at Risk Act's* (SARA) "jeopardy test." This safeguard exists to prevent projects that could:
 - Threaten the survival of endangered species
 - Damage critical habitat
 - Undermine species recovery efforts
- Economic development should not come at the expense of endangered wildlife and ecosystems.

2 Fast-Tracking Projects Means Less Environmental Oversight

- The proposal would:
 - Shorten impact assessment timelines
 - Give ministers authority to alter impact assessment conditions
 - Prioritize faster approvals for major projects
- These changes risk:
 - Reduced and insufficient scientific review
 - Less transparency and public accountability
 - Weaker environmental safeguards
 - Decisions made without fully understanding long-term environmental impacts
- "Streamlining" should not mean weakening protections.

3 Federal Economic Zones Could Sacrifice Sensitive Ecosystems & Critical Habitats

- Federal Economic Zones may allow projects to bypass existing environmental safeguards in ecologically sensitive areas.
- This could lead to:
 - Habitat destruction
 - Increased biodiversity loss
 - Long-term environmental damage
- Protecting habitat is essential to protecting wildlife. Species cannot recover if the ecosystems they depend on are destroyed.

4 Excessive Cabinet Powers & Reduced Accountability

- The proposal would give Cabinet broad powers to:
 - Pre-approve projects
 - Override protections for species-at-risk
 - Modify assessment requirements
- This raises serious concerns about:
 - Democratic accountability
 - Transparency in environmental decision-making
 - Proper environmental oversight
- Major environmental decisions should not be made behind closed doors with limited accountability.

5 Canada Should Strengthen, Not Weaken, Biodiversity Protection

- These proposals move Canada backwards at a time when biodiversity loss and climate change are accelerating.
- Canada should be:
 - Strengthening environmental laws
 - Protecting habitats
 - Supporting species recovery
- The proposed changes reflect a backwards step on [Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy](#) to Halt and Reverse Biodiversity Loss in Canada, undermining our position in international efforts.

6 Indigenous Rights and Consultation Concerns

- Fast-tracking projects could undermine:
 - The Crown's duty to consult
 - Treaty and Aboriginal rights
 - Efforts towards reconciliation
 - Canada's commitments under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

ACTIONS

We are asking for your support through these three simple actions:

 **Submit a public comment before July 22, 2026**

Send your feedback to: engagement@pco-bcp.gc.ca

Use the talking points above to personalize your message. Even a short submission can make a difference.



Share this action alert

Help raise public awareness by sharing this brief with your friends, family, and networks. Public pressure can influence government decisions.

Contact your MP

Email your Member of Parliament and ask them to oppose proposals that weaken environmental protections and species-at-risk laws. You can find your riding's MP's contact information [here](#) by inputting your postal code.

SAMPLE COMMENT/LETTER

 **Please do not copy this word-for-word!** Use it as a reference and personalize it with your own words and concerns.

 **Read our [comments](#)** for a deeper analysis of the issues.

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my concern about the federal government's proposed legislative, regulatory, and policy reforms outlined in the "Getting Major Projects Built in Canada" discussion paper.

While I support responsible and efficient infrastructure development, I do not support proposals that weaken environmental protections, reduce oversight, or increase risks to endangered species, critical habitat, and biodiversity.

In particular, I do not support the following proposals:

- **Exemptions from the *Species at Risk Act* ("jeopardy test").** The proposal would allow Cabinet to exempt projects from the *Species at Risk Act's* "jeopardy test." This safeguard exists to prevent projects that could threaten the survival and recovery of endangered species and damage critical habitat. Weakening these protections at a time of accelerating biodiversity loss is deeply concerning.
- **Expanded discretionary power over environmental assessments.** The Minister of Environment, Climate Change, and Nature and the Minister of One Canadian Economy will have authority to adjust impact assessment



conditions. Existing environmental laws, including impact assessments, are foundational democratic safeguards to uphold the rule of law. Expanding discretionary authority in this way risks undermining consistency, predictability, and public trust in environmental decision-making.

- **The creation of Federal Economic Zones and the proposal to fast-track approvals for major projects.** The proposed Federal Economic Zones, combined with shortened review timelines, raise concerns about reduced scientific scrutiny and weakened environmental safeguards. Faster approvals should not come at the expense of thorough impact assessment or meaningful public accountability.
- **Impacts on Indigenous rights and the duty to consult.** Accelerated approval processes risk undermining the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous peoples, as well as commitments under Treaty and Aboriginal rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Meaningful consultation requires time, transparency, and good-faith engagement, and cannot be treated as a procedural step to be expedited.

While I understand the importance of economic development and infrastructure planning, it is possible to pursue these goals without weakening core environmental safeguards.

I urge the federal government not to move forward with proposals that weaken the Species at Risk Act, reduce environmental oversight, or grant broad exemption powers for projects that may harm wildlife and ecosystems.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,