



The Professional Institute
of the Public Service
of Canada

VANISHING SCIENCE

The Disappearance of Canadian Public Interest Science



Harper Government Cuts to Science Overwhelmingly Detrimental and Out of Sync with Public's Priorities: Surveys

The results of an extensive survey of federal government scientists on the impact of ongoing cutbacks and a further public opinion survey of Canadians' top science priorities reveal that, in addition to seriously harming Canada's capacity to serve the public, the Harper government's agenda for science is severely out of sync with the wishes of a large majority of Canadians. Invitations to participate in an online survey of federal scientists, hosted by Environics Research, were sent to 15,398 PIPSC members – scientists, researchers and engineers – engaged in scientific work in over 40 federal departments and agencies. Of these, 4,069 (26%) responded between June 5 and 19, 2013. The survey is considered accurate + or – 1.6%, 19 times out of 20. A similar but shorter public opinion survey was conducted by Environics of 1,003 Canadians between November 14 and 20, 2013. The results are considered accurate + or – 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

The results of both surveys are outlined in a report titled *Vanishing Science: The Disappearance of Canadian Public Interest Science*.

In Brief

Measuring the Impact

Nine out of 10 federal scientists (91%) believe cuts to federal science budgets will have a detrimental impact on the federal government's ability to serve the public interest. Over half – 51% – believe the impact to be very detrimental. Similarly, a significant majority (69%) of Canadians believe the \$355 million scheduled to be cut from science budgets over the next year alone will have a somewhat or very negative impact. Even among Conservative supporters surveyed, nearly 6 out of 10 (59%) feel the cuts will have a negative impact.

Lost Capacity, Declining Environmental Protection

Over 9 out of 10 scientists (94%) feel recent cuts have had a negative impact on overall science capacity in the federal government, of whom nearly 6 out of 10 (59%) believe the impact is major. Over three-quarters of federal scientists (78%) report cuts to capacity in their own workplace. Nearly 7 out of 10 scientists (69%) at Environment Canada and over 8 out of 10 (83%) at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) believe Canada is doing a worse job of environmental protection and sustainable resource management than 5 years ago.

Even at Natural Resources Canada, where 24% of scientists feel the department is doing a better job of supporting the oil, gas and mining sectors, over half (53%) of scientists feel the department is doing a worse job of ensuring environmental protection and sustainable resource management than 5 years ago.

Disappearing Acts

Nearly 9 out of 10 (86%) of DFO scientists believe changes to the Fisheries Act will hamper Canada's ability to protect fish and their habitat.

Underfunding, Changing Priorities

Seven out of 10 federal scientists (71%) feel their department/agency does not allocate sufficient resources to effectively fulfill its mandate. Eight out of 10 scientists (80%) at the National Research Council believe Canada has done a worse job of advancing our international standing in innovation and technology over the past 5 years. Almost 9 out of 10 (87%) believe recent changes are limiting or will limit fundamental or basic research, and nearly as many (86%) believe this will have a negative impact on research and development.

Missing in Action

Approximately three-quarters (73%) of federal scientists are concerned that new departmental policies on intellectual property, permission to publish, and collaboration compromise their ability to collaborate with international colleagues. Only 36% say they are approved to attend conferences, and less than one-quarter (24%) feel the approval process for attending conferences, courses and other events is fair, transparent and performed on a timely basis.

Getting the Balance Wrong

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Canadians believe the top priority for government scientific activity should be protection of public health, safety, and the environment, compared to fewer than one-quarter (24%) who believe the priority should be business innovation and resource development (10%) or both priorities equally (14%). Over two-thirds (67%) of Conservatives surveyed also felt the top priority should be protection of public health, safety, and the environment – as did over three-quarters (76%) of those surveyed earning between \$50,000 and \$80,000. ■

Get the full report at: <http://www.pipsc.ca/vanishingscience>