

c/o 1290 Tracksell Ave
Victoria, BC V8P 2C9
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Core Area Liquid Waste Management Committee
Capital Regional District
Victoria, BC

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View Royal Mayor and Council <mayorandcouncil@viewroyal.ca>,
Esquimalt Council members <council@esquimalt.ca>;

Dear Mayors and Councillors – Members of the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Committee

Re: Necessity for proper sewage treatment for CRD

For approximately 50 years many of us, as citizens of Victoria, have been waiting for Victoria and the Capital Region to undertake its responsibility for proper treatment of our sewage. There are many compelling reasons why we should be treating our sewage, and there will be no better time than now for this to happen.

The interconnectedness of our marine and terrestrial ecosystems means that all life is being affected by the pollutants of many types that are being pumped daily into the offshore waters of Victoria and many other places. It may be easy for us here in Victoria to pretend that there is no impact, because most of the interactions take place away from our line of vision or at scales too small for us to notice. However, the cumulative effects are there – in the high coliform counts, the degraded ecosystems, the increased pharmaceutical waste, and the shellfish harvesting bans throughout the region. The idea that none of this sewage returns to Victoria’s beaches – that the currents will always wash it all away – is contradicted by the driftwood, dead fish and all the detritus on the beaches all around the coast. The ocean currents of the region are diverse and multi-directional, as any boater knows, and are constantly changing depending on tides and winds. As David Suzuki so succinctly puts it, “On our finite planet, there is no ‘away’.”

It is our understanding that a recent report by independent scientists (SETAC report), commissioned by the CRD, concluded that we can *not* rely on the dilution and dispersion capacity of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the marine waters around Victoria to absorb our waste, especially in view of the region's projected growth, and pointed out that Victoria is only one of several cities and towns situated around the Salish Sea. Victorians have a duty to protect the communal marine ecosystems of the region in the best way possible. In particular, we wish to emphasize the reduced flushing of marine waters on the East Coast of Vancouver Island.

Of primary concern in terms of Greater Victoria's sewage outputs are the chemical contaminants, from all manner of medicinal substances and cleaning compounds, including endocrine disrupters, both natural and synthetic, PCBs, micro-particles of plastics, heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Many of these compounds exceed the limits considered harmful to the environment; some (including mercury, copper and phenols) evidently exceed these limits by over 1000 percent. Phthalates – plastics derivatives – occur in concentrations over 100,000 times higher than recommended safe levels, according to the 2006 Macdonald Environmental Sciences Ltd report.

Those compounds that do not break down easily bioaccumulate and concentrate up the food chain, leading to the situation in which the bodies of top predators like orcas literally become toxic sites (based on the work of Dr. Peter Ross and colleagues). One class of compounds about which we know little are the widely prescribed Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, which, among other effects, impact the photosensitivity of shrimp, making them swim toward light rather than away from it. Although this occurs in concentrations that have no known impact on humans, these compounds can affect the behaviour of shrimp populations, which are a major food source for some whales and other sea mammals and on fish that we depend upon.

Studies over the last five decades have repeatedly shown us biomagnification of serious toxins in marine life off of southern Vancouver Island. We now see pristine mountain lakes accumulating these poisons, not from localized industries near these lakes, but rather from the wild salmon that have concentrated these toxins in open oceanic waters before returning to their natal streams and rearing lakes. Carcinogens are found in Arctic wildlife, not from Arctic industry, but primarily from oceanic currents and food webs connecting temperate inshore, offshore and Arctic ecosystems. Victoria is one source of this contamination and Victorians have a larger responsibility, as most other coastal cities, to minimize our contribution to this accumulation of toxins in marine life. That a considerable proportion of the human diet in coastal British Columbia, including that of First Nations, is still derived from marine fish including salmon, halibut, herring and rockfish, further emphasizes the responsibility for the best sewage treatment that any society can afford.

The shorelines around the entire CRD are habitats that are potentially highly productive for a whole variety of food organisms, but because of the contamination from sewage and other sources are unusable for food production, even though in the past they had been nurturing thousands of people for millennia.

The question of sewage treatment for a region like Greater Victoria is definitely not black and white. There are degrees of treatment, and time frames to consider, and balancing costs and benefits is obviously a big issue. However, we believe the time is far past the “yes or no” stage. Decision-makers and leaders such as yourselves need to consider overall costs, including social costs, food security, potential tourism revenues, and responsibility to future generations. Deciding whether to treat, or not to treat, the region’s sewage should no longer be the question. The energies of all should be expended on determining what would be the most effective type or combination of treatments. Other cities and regions have faced this question, and it is time we in Victoria do as well. We need a system that respects environmental integrity, prevents and reduces toxic waste, helps to recycle resources and use energy efficiently and makes our marine waters and shorelines safe and free of harmful pollutants.

Ultimately, we need a system in place that would ensure that none of us would hesitate to bring our children and grandchildren down to the beach anywhere around the coast of the Capital Region. Surely with your leadership we can move towards this goal in meaningful stages that will not leave us stagnated in an endless cycle of destructive delay and debate.

Thank you for considering this letter.

Yours sincerely,

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