

New era dumps Land Reserve commissioners.

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In a 179 word release quietly issued on a Friday afternoon in early December, a release that quoted no-one and did not reference any living person beyond the 11 men and women they'd fired and their 5 civil servant replacements, the media spinners at the Sustainable Resources Ministry announced government's dismissal of the Agricultural Land Commission,

A regular CBC radio listener and 6 o'clock news addict, I'd heard nothing of this until a few nights ago as I was flipping channels, and there it was: Vaughan Palmer in discussion with other journalists commenting on how interesting it was — compared to the HUGE public outcry over Six Mile Ranch just a few years ago — that the government had disbanded the Land Commission and no-one had even raised an eyebrow...

What?! I scanned the media releases posted on the BC Ministry of Agriculture's website. Nothing. I double checked. Nothing. Clicked to the Land Reserve Commission website and there it was, a continuously scrolling blurb in its own little virtual window: "The provincial government has replaced BC's Land Reserve Commission with an interim commission consisting of five senior civil servants. [\[More\]](#)"

Clicking on [\[More\]](#) produced a blandly-crafted December 7th release of the Sustainable Resource Ministry offering the names of the Commissioners axed, the names of the bureaucrats who replaced them and the following details:

GOVERNMENT REPLACES LAND RESERVE COMMISSIONERS. VICTORIA The provincial government has replaced B.C.'s Land Reserve Commission with an interim commission consisting of five senior civil servants... Government will appoint a new commission early in the new year. In the coming weeks, key parties will be consulted about implementing the government's New Era commitment to make the commission more responsive to community needs. In the meantime, five government officials have been appointed to conduct the day-to-day business of the commission and support the transition work.

And what, exactly, is "the transition work"? Before the election, the Liberals made no bones about "making the ALR more regionally responsive." Generally accepted as code for "back to the good old days" when ALR applications were ruled on by politicians, not public servants.

Glenmore orchardist Al Clarke, fresh from a meeting in Victoria, is pleased by the change. "Instead of preserving agricultural land for future generations, the fate of the land will be decided by regional economics.... They won't abolish the ALR, but farmers can manoeuvre within its boundaries. Farmers aren't locked in anymore. If you have a piece of land that's not economically viable, you may be able to cut off five-acre parcels. The farmer will come first, not the land." (Kelowna Daily Courier, December 19th.) MLA John Weisbeck (Kelowna-Lake Country), who thinks the province has taken a "one size fits all view of the province for too long", favours a regional approach to the ALR: "I don't understand why we have an ALR for the Peace River district," Weisbeck admits. Ah, true candor. Such an admirable quality in a politician.

This government appears intent on dismantling everything else in the province, why not farmland? For over a decade, Canada has cut financial support to farmers faster and more deeply than any other OECD nation. Our farmers now receive the lowest levels of support of any OECD nation and support to BC farmers ranks the lowest in Canada.

If the Liberals were smart, they'd make the Land Commission truly independent (answerable to future generations) and design the Ferrari's of farm support policies that recognize and reward the

environmental sustainability our farmers are already champions at undertaking. Instead they're self-serving (they have, after all, election campaigns to fund; a need not limited to the Liberals), and promises made to form government are now jamming developer's hands into every pocket in this province. Why should future generations be beyond reach? Starve the farmers of good public policy and they will go away. Particularly if their fate twists in the wind of regional politics, they're about to find out what farming next to a residential subdivision is all about and the developers are on the doorstep to buy their land. Hell, they'll race to the door...

Where are all the voices that so eloquently raised themselves in protest over Six Mile Ranch? Perhaps resigned to the fact that if no one is going to look after this province's farmers, who is to say the farmers shouldn't look after themselves?

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