



## **PEN Canada concerned by silencing of publicly funded scientists**

TORONTO, April 12, 2012 – Today PEN Canada voiced concerns that the federal government’s restrictions on media access to publicly funded scientists have become a serious infringement on the right to freedom of expression in Canada.

Several journalists and organizations, including the Canadian Science Writers Association (CSWA) and L’Association des communicateurs scientifiques du Québec (ACS), have repeatedly questioned the Canadian government’s “muzzling” of publicly funded scientists when their findings appear to cause embarrassment, or to recommend courses of action contrary to current policy. In 2007 the federal government introduced rules to control interviews with Environment Canada scientists. These rules have resulted in an 80 percent drop in media coverage of climate change science.

Recent instances of government muzzling include:

- the Fisheries Department’s prohibition against Dr. Kristi Miller speaking to the press, after Miller published a report that suggested a virus from contaminated farm fish may have caused the 2009 collapse of Fraser River sockeye.
- Environment Canada’s decision to cancel press interviews with an employee whose report concluded that toxic air emissions in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are unregulated by land-use permits.
- Environment Canada’s decision to prevent an employee talking to the press after a report he authored described a large hole in the ozone layer above the Arctic

"The federal government is obliged to judge publicly funded science on the quality of its evidence and analysis," said Philip Slayton, Chair of PEN Canada's National Affairs Committee, "not on whether its findings serve economic or political interests. We cannot expect Canadian scientists to work productively for the greater good at home, or exert Canadian influence abroad, if their work is routinely subordinated to the demands of political messaging. If this is not the case, the government should offer a plausible explanation for its actions."

PEN Canada supports the calls of the CSWA, ACS and other concerned groups for Canadian scientists to be allowed to communicate freely with the media and urges the federal government to take steps to ensure that any restraints on the free flow of scientific information are lifted immediately.

*PEN Canada fights censorship and defends the right to freedom of expression.*

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