

# Abbott's environment attacks are straight out of the Canadian playbook

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David Suzuki

The Canadian government has been running a campaign to stifle organisations and individuals from speaking out about legitimate environmental concerns. The Abbott government appears to following the Canadian game plan.



Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Tony Abbott met in Ottawa in 2014. *Photo: Reuters*

It started with an open letter from the federal minister responsible for natural resources touting the country's need to focus on energy markets and cut regulations to advance the national economic interest.

The minister went on to say that environmental and other "radical groups" were trying to block opportunities to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. He claimed these groups threatened to hijack the regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda and kill off jobs.

Sound familiar? You might be excused for thinking this came from the Tony Abbott government, but it didn't.



Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper speaks to supporters during a rally in Montreal. The sign in the background reads: "Justin (Trudeau) not ready". *Photo: Christinne Muschi*

It was a January 2012 letter from one of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's ministers. The now infamous "foreign-funded radical environmentalists" letter was the first salvo in an ongoing barrage of government tactics to stifle organisations and individuals from speaking out about legitimate environmental concerns.

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Over the winter of 2012, the rhetoric grew progressively worse. The environment minister spoke about offshore funds being laundered through Canadian charities, and the public safety minister spuriously implied that environmental groups could be involved in terrorist activities.

The reason for these out-of-the-blue attacks on environmental organisations soon became clear: it was all to justify the Omnibus Bill introduced in the House of Commons in March 2012.

The bill introduced sweeping changes to environmental laws, gutting much of the protection that had been carefully crafted over decades, and which Canadians had come to depend on for clean air, water and soil.

Again, does this sound familiar? What Tony Abbott is trying to do now in Australia appears to be straight out of the Stephen Harper playbook. But the moves in Australia to strip away environmental rights may just be the beginning.

In Canada they kept going even further. In the 2012 federal budget, the Conservatives gave an additional \$8 million to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to increase monitoring of Canadian charities that engage in political activities. This at a time when most other government agencies were being cut back in the aftermath of the 2009 recession.

Under Canadian law, charitable organisations are able to conduct political activities – defined as efforts to retain, oppose, or change a law, policy, or decision of any level of government. The CRA explicitly recognises that charities can make a valuable contribution to development of policy and legislation through their expertise on important national issues. But the caveat is that they can't spend more than 10 per cent of their total resources on such activities, nor can they engage in partisan support for political parties or candidates.

After four years, the CRA has conducted extensive financial and political-activity audits of 60 groups. Not surprisingly, almost all of Canada's largest environmental organisations ended up being investigated. These time-consuming and expensive audits looked at every aspect of an organisation's actions, including what they write, what kind of partnerships they enter into, rallies they attend, where they spend funds and how they report to government. The audits have resulted in education letters and compliance agreements for most of the organisations caught up in the process, and even the loss of charitable status for one.

The chill this has sent through Canada's charitable sector has been palpable. Many organisations report they are fearful about speaking out. Some are now self-censoring their activities, or

spending scarce dollars seeking legal opinions before they put information out to the public. By simply instructing the CRA to crack down on political activities, the Conservatives have polarised Canadian society between those who believe environmental groups are radical extremists and those who believe these organisations are being bullied and harassed by their own government. It's not a pretty picture, and it will take years to undo the damage.

Canadians will go to the polls in October and this is now an election issue, among many other Harper government so-called reforms that have eroded open and accountable government. The Harper government has put offside not just the environment sector, but civil society as a whole. With some polls suggesting Harper is on his last political legs, Tony Abbott would be wise to ask himself whether putting mining interests above the rights of Australians will harm his own political survival.

This sorry tale holds a strong message for Australians. Your government is taking a page from Canada's playbook to demonise environmental organisations and prevent them from doing good and necessary work.

It might be framed as a jobs and economic issue, but in reality this is an attack on democracy and responsible government. Do everything you can now to expose efforts to shut down the important work of environmental organisations.

It will take years for Canada to recover from this sad chapter in our history. Australians, don't let it happen to you.

**David Suzuki is a Canadian scientist, broadcaster, author and emeritus professor at the University of British Columbia.**

## **IT'S TIME TO GET RID OF DAVID SUZUKI !**

Suzuki is yet again illegally interfering in Canadian partisan politics, this time through an Australian media outlet. We want a nation where charity organizations, like Suzuki, DO NOT pretend to be charities. We also want a nation where interfering in partisan politics leads to consequences for organizations, like Suzuki, pretending to be charities. We need a nation where charity organizations DO NOT violate the taxation laws. Otherwise, these organizations serve NO legal purpose, and NO useful purpose, to the nation. These organization CANNOT be allowed to closely participate with political parties like Green Party.

IT'S TIME TO GET RID OF SUZUKI ! We need a NEW Suzuki that DOES NOT make a mockery of the electoral system. We need a NEW Suzuki that DOES NOT interfere in illegal partisan political activities. We need a NEW Suzuki that DOES NOT flout taxation

laws. We need to get rid of the current Suzuki, forever ! One media outlet has recently organized a PETITION against Suzuki, demanding that Canada Revenue Agency AUDIT this organization's non-profit charity tax-exempt status, given its excessive interference in partisan politics. GET RID OF SUZUKI BY SIGNING THE PETITION HERE ... <http://wp.me/p1jq40-8SQ> SUZUKI MUST SUFFER THE SCRUTINY OF THE MEDIA AND THE SPOTLIGHT OF CANADA REVENUE AGENCY. For the whole truth about SUZUKI, please go to the following links ... <http://wp.me/P1jq40-21m> <http://wp.me/p1jq40-66Q> <http://wp.me/P1jq40-4aU>

Petition Against David Suzuki For Flouting Taxations Laws -

<http://pesticidetruths.com/2015/08/18/petition-against-david-suzuki-for-flouting-taxations-laws-mr-ezra-levant-demands-audit-by-canada-revenue-agency-illegal-interference-in-partisan-politics-public-policy-2015-08-17/>