

NOTICE TO MEMBERSHIP

May 27, 2014

Update on Bill 24 (ALC/ALR).

Today the Liberal Government moved to limit debate on Bill 24 and with a majority government it is likely that the Bill will be passed. We knew this was an option for the government – and we were ready for it.

In the words of Winston Churchill, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Protecting farm land and farmers will require ongoing engagement with government, farmers and the public. While disappointed that the legislation was pushed through (as outlined in our previous communication), BCAC has been preparing for this possibility and next steps.

While we did not achieve all of the changes to Bill 24 that we requested, we were successful in:

- A return to proactive and centralized provincial administration of all ALR applications by the ALC.
- Reinstatement of the ALC’s provincial panel to proactively adjudicate application for reasons of provincial significance and/or substantive impact in more than one region.
- Applying a descending order of priority to the new factors (section 4.3) to ensure that the ALC remains accountable and committed to its purpose to preserve agricultural land and encourage farming on agricultural land as per Section 6 of the Agriculture Land Act.
- Commitment by government to actively engage BCAC and other key stakeholders in the development of all regulations and practices relating to Bill 24, and
- Commitment to work with the BCAC and other key stakeholders to explore the feasibility and implications of government adopting a “net benefit to agriculture” policy as it relates to decisions surrounding the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

Government will now focus on developing the regulations needed for the new legislation. Minister Letnick committed to the BCAC to work through with key stakeholders, including farmers and rancher, the ALC and local government to develop these regulations. We expect to begin working with the Ministry in the coming weeks to develop a process that actively engages producers.

The regulations will give direction to the ALC and the Regional Panels. BCAC will be working with the Minister to ensure the long term protection of farm land throughout the province and provide bon-a-fide farmers the tools and flexibility to be competitive, sustainable and meet consumer demands.

Thank you to all farmers and ranchers for your active engagement on this discussion. Please work through your BCAC member organizations to provide input for the ongoing discussion. Government has committed to engagement with producers. We will be holding them to that commitment.

“BCAC has always been committed to preserving agriculture land, but we are also committed to preserving farmers. If enjoying locally grown and raised goods is truly important to British Columbians, we need to find ways to support economically sustainable farming and attract youth into agriculture”.

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Sincerely,
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Chair, BC Agriculture Council

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