If you ever wondered what the federal government really meant by “World Class” oil spill response, now you know. The English Bay spill on April 8 proved out a lot of the criticisms that Living Oceans has been making about spill preparedness in B.C., yet to listen to federal government pronouncements, you’d think the response was perfection itself. This, then, is a world class spill response.

The Coast Guard has spared no effort to praise its own efforts and those of Western Canada Marine Response Corporation, the oil-company owned outfit contracted to pick up the oil. Commissioner Jody Thomas in “enormously pleased”; Assistant Commissioner Roger Girouard says the response was by the book and advised the CBC on April 11 that only about six litres of oil remained in English Bay. Girouard maintained that 80 percent of the oil had been cleaned up by skimmers working the water’s surface. “You don’t contain 80 percent of a spill inside 36 hours and call that inadequate,” he said. “I will not accept that definition of my team.”

On the response time, Commissioner Thomas was very specific: “Within 25 minutes of notification, we were on the water. And with [Western Canada Marine Response Corporation], we worked through the night to skim the water and boom the ship.”

The only statement above that is entirely correct and complete is that the response was by the book, which is to say that the WCMRC was on the scene with recovery equipment within the time prescribed by Transport Canada. From the handbook: “[I]n Port Metro Vancouver it is required that WCMRC maintain a dedicated package of equipment that is capable of responding to a 150 tonne spill within 6 hours.”

The fact that they didn’t actually deploy their booms until sometime between midnight and 2:00 a.m. takes them a little outside that response time. They said that they couldn’t figure out where the oil was coming from.

Clearly, a textbook spill response will result in the oiling of Vancouver’s beaches, as it has here. This was said to be a two-tonne spill (2,700 litres); Kinder Morgan’s idea of a “credible worst case” spill is 10,000 tonnes, just to put the question of beach oiling in perspective.

But what about the size of the spill and the “80 percent cleanup”? By April 13, the Coast Guard was admitting that the spill size estimate they were using was a conservative estimate made by flying over the area to determine the spill’s visible dimensions and multiplying that by estimated spill thickness. That sounds quite reasonable, unless you knew from the time of the initial report at 5:05 p.m. on Wednesday that much of the oil was already underwater and therefore invisible from the air.

Rob O’Dea, a sailor who reported the spill, said, “…it was an oil slick about half a kilometre long and 250 metres wide. The surface was covered with a blue sheen and just beneath the surface there were globules of oil by the thousands per square metre. They were within the top few inches of the water. Some were the size of a pea, many were the size of a fist.”

And where was it coming from? Rob apparently had no difficulty figuring that out:

Continued on page 3
I am truly grateful to all of you who responded so quickly to our call to action on the proposed revisions to British Columbia’s Society Act last fall—because it worked! Proposed amendments to the Act (now the “Societies Act”) were tabled in the Legislature in March and reached third reading on April 22, without the egregious provision that would have allowed SLAPP suits by members of the public who felt a society was not acting in the public interest!

Never doubt that your response to our action alert was heard: this is what the Ministry website has to say about its consultation on the flawed proposal:

“During the consultation period, which ended on October 15, 2014, the Ministry received substantive feedback from more than 200 stakeholders. In addition, more than 7,000 submissions were directed at the proposed new right for the general public to complain in court about societies’ activities that are detrimental to the public interest.”

I’m particularly thankful to you for helping stop this amendment because of course Living Oceans remains a target for tar sands developers and pipeline proponents, whose pockets are deep enough to consider filing frivolous lawsuits. As the full extent of the collaboration among industry and governments emerges in the oh-so-badly redacted diary of Mike Duffy, to spin the opposition to pipelines and tankers as—well, let’s just say ‘activity not in the public interest’, to keep things in context—it becomes quite clear that the proposed new law was part of a sustained strategy to silence opposition.

As I write, the citizens of Alberta have just delivered a resounding victory to the NDP, ending a 40-year dynasty during which the provincial Conservatives and the oil industry saw their interests as inextricably entwined. I can only hope that Ottawa gets the message, calls off the witch hunts and tones down the rhetoric before public confidence in the work of public interest organizations is irreversibly damaged.

Sincerely,

Karen Wristen, Executive Director
“When we passed by the stern of the offending freighter there were larger, sticky globs of black goo a meter long and as thick as your arm. Oil was everywhere at and below the surface. The crew of the ship were madly trying to load 50 gallon drums from a small boat onto the ship while at the same time they were dropping small pails over the side of the ship and hauling up water. It was a keystone cops kind of scene and the Port Metro boat passed by in close proximity but did not intervene.” (That Port Metro boat is apparently the one that “we” had on the water “within 25 minutes”; Rob says it showed up about 6:00 p.m. WCMRC wasn’t there at 8:00 p.m. when he decided to go in.)

Unconfined oil will spread to a thickness of about 0.4 mm. Sticky globs of black goo a metre long and as thick as your arm don’t. Yet there was Girouard, insisting that “physics tells us that it will float” (a direct quote, by the way, from one of Enbridge’s experts at the hearings on the Northern Gateway Pipeline hearings) and reporting on the reductions in surface oil as if it were all that required response.

The truth is that nobody will ever accurately estimate how much oil spilled, given that within a very short time after the spill, so much of it submerged beneath the water’s surface. We may be finding tar balls from this spill washing ashore for years to come.

As recently as two years ago, the Coast Guard had a dedicated spill response vessel and a trained crew at the [former] Kitsilano base who, according to retired Coast Guard Capt. Tony Toxopeus, could have responded within an hour and perhaps contained the surface spill before it hit the beaches. “They’re downplaying it to such a degree it’s shameful, it’s terrible, it’s dishonest,” Toxopeus said.

“Even that equipment would have been inadequate to respond to submerged oil, which could pass under the floating booms and travel with the current. Note that this was bunker C oil, carried by nearly every vessel in the Port. It’s much like the bitumen that Kinder Morgan wants to ship—a heavy oil, given to forming dense, sticky mats and globs, rather than just spreading on the surface.

In summary, “World Class” oil spill response apparently means critically disabling the ability of the Coast Guard to respond to spills in the harbour of the B.C. city most liable to experience an oil spill and denying that you did so; handing the task over to a corporation owned by the oil companies themselves; and legislating response times that are clearly inadequate to protect the Greenest City from beach oiling. Add in the power of the federal government’s communications machine to spin the facts—80 percent recovery, 25 minutes to have “a boat in the water” and “physics tells us it will float”—and repeat ad nauseum that you’re doing an excellent job.

We don’t buy it and judging by the public response, neither do most people in Vancouver. “
What are MPAs?

Since Living Oceans formed in 1998 we’ve been working to get a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) established on the B.C. coast. MPAs are places in the ocean that are protected like parks to provide sanctuary for species and habitat, and safeguard foodwebs so they can recover and thrive. It allows mammals, birds and fish to flourish when their entire range cannot be protected.

A marine plan that includes an MPA network preserves a broad diversity of life that includes different genetic stocks in different areas. Ecosystems with greater biodiversity are more resistant to environmental changes and recover more quickly from natural and human-caused disasters. This is especially important because of increasing pressures on ecosystems from climate change and ocean acidification.

Canada has 197 MPAs in the Pacific Ocean, but most are very small. Combined, they take up only three percent (about 14,000km²) of the total area of Canada’s Pacific waters. Canada is a long way from meeting its commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect 10 percent of our waters in MPAs by 2020.

Without a plan that restrains unwise industrial uses of our coastal waters we risk losing the priceless benefits the ocean provides such as oxygen, carbon fixing and weather stability. Dollar values can be calculated for benefits such as recreational opportunities, food webs and other resources that provide livelihoods for many people on the coast.
In April, 23 fisheries and conservation scientists from around the world assembled at a Science Forum in Vancouver to discuss how marine protected areas (MPAs) can benefit both ocean ecosystems and commercial fisheries. Living Oceans played a major role in the forum’s steering committee which was a collaboration between the fisheries and conservation sectors in British Columbia.

The five day event opened with a speech presented jointly by two well-known and outspoken scientists with differing views on MPAs, Dr. Ray Hilborn from the University of Washington and Dr. Anne Salomon from Simon Fraser University. This set the stage and the tone for the forum that brought experts with different perspectives together to develop points of agreement.

“We wanted to foster a common understanding and to inform the design of an MPA network for our coast that can benefit ocean health and healthy fisheries,” said Karin Bodtker, Living Oceans Director of Mapping and Analysis. “If we don’t work collaboratively with fishermen, and other marine stakeholders, we won’t end up with a network that everyone agrees to support and steward.”

The steering committee worked for more than two years to find the right questions, develop the format, gather experts from around the world, and assemble an audience of 60 government and First Nation decision makers, commercial fishermen and conservationists. Roundtable discussions tackled MPA issues such as the spillover benefits to fisheries, social and economic effects, coordinated fisheries and MPA management, and decision support tools. In a surprise request, members of the Marine Protected Area Team from three levels of government asked the panel of scientists to review draft objectives for B.C.’s first MPA network and make suggestions to better integrate the ecological and fisheries aspects. The scientists enthusiastically took on the challenge at a weekend workshop following the forum.

The steering committee, including Karin, will continue to meet. “The forum strengthened relationships and we’re developing the next steps for our collaboration,” she said. “We need to put a voice to our new shared understanding and continue to plan for a network of MPAs together.”

Living Oceans is hosting its first annual cooking workshop series: Salmon in the Kitchen. These interactive, hands-on workshops will give participants the opportunity to learn how to cook, filet and can fresh fish in the community kitchen at Save On Meats at 43 W. Hastings St. in Vancouver. The workshops will be led by culinary consultant Doris Gnandt and Serena Chu throughout the summer and fall as part of our Sea to Fork program that supports sustainable seafood and local fishermen. The salmon will be supplied by Skipper Otto’s community supported fishery.

**DATES**
- June 23, 6:00-8:00 pm  
  **Cooking fish**
- July 14, 6:00-8:00 pm  
  **Fileting fish**
- August 18, 6:00-8:00 pm  
  **Canning fish**

More dates in August, September and October will be added. All the workshops are listed on the registration page where you can also sign up.

*www.livingoceans.org/salmoninthekitchen*
Living Oceans filed a formal complaint at the end of April against the certification of Marine Harvest’s Marsh Bay salmon farm under the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) program. The farm is the first salmon farm in North America to be approved under the ASC certification program, making it a precedent-setting case. This is concerning as the Marsh Bay site continues to report alarmingly unsustainable on-site practices.

Since receiving certification in January 2015, the open net-pen farm reported the accidental drowning of four sea lions in its predator nets and in April its sea lice counts soared to dangerous levels. Either of these events would have disentitled it to certification had they occurred during the third-party audit conducted by SAI Global.

Marine Harvest applied for certification of its farms at Duncan and Doyle Islands. The audits will be done in June. B.C. salmon farming companies Cermaq, Grieg and Marine Harvest have publicly committed to get all of their farms certified under the ASC program by 2020. With this level of looming industry pressure and expectancy, it becomes extremely important to ensure that the certification audits are done properly. This is, indeed, the only way to ensure that true progress is being made on the water, not just on paper. 

Several open net-pen salmon farms lie in the path of wild salmon out-migration routes where sea lice from the farms latch on to the passing smolts. Other farms are situated in rockfish conservation areas where fish feces and food waste from the farms accumulate on the sea floor.

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This sea lion was drowned when it became entangled in a salmon farm’s predator net.

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Morag Carter (left) has left us after serving as our Marine Planning and Protected Areas Director for the past year. Morag was a key member of the Living Oceans team that worked on the Marine Planning Partnership (see page 4).

Gord Curry (right) moved seamlessly from DFO into his position as our Local Marine Planner a few years back. And with equal ease Gord has shifted into retirement so he can devote more time to doing what he loves the most: bird watching and all things outdoors.

Jenelle Yonkman is doing an internship with our GIS department. She is an Advanced Diploma student in BCIT’s Geographic Information Systems program who is completing her final requirements during her practicum placement at Living Oceans. Jenelle creates interactive and static maps for public education and analyzes spatial data, working on projects related to research and analysis of marine protected areas, sensitive ecosystems, tidal power generation and habitat modelling.

Maarten Pik and Stefan Amersfoort are interning at our Vancouver office until the end of June, designing a campaign to reduce plastic pollution in the ocean. The two students are studying Coastal and Marine Management at VHL University in Leeuwarden, Holland. Stefan and Maarten have been researching micro plastics in the oceans waters around Metro Vancouver, which is an under-researched area.

Eliska Lom (right) is a summer student who is coming aboard as the Marine Debris Program Coordinator of our Clear the Coast campaign. Eliska is in the Renewable Resources: Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. She has been a wildlife volunteer in two national parks in South Africa.

Left to right: Jenelle Yonkman, Maarten Pik and Stefan Amersfoort are doing internships with Living Oceans during the first half of 2015.

Kat Middleton (above) wrapped up a contract as a Policy Analyst with the Marine Planning and Protected Areas campaign. If you live on Vancouver Island you may have seen Kat’s presentation on Why we need healthy oceans.
The SeaChoice App

The movement towards sustainable seafood is about solutions for our oceans. We understand that choosing sustainable seafood can be challenging, that’s why SeaChoice has created this easy-to-use application to help you identify the most sustainable seafood choices you can make everywhere you go! To get the free app search for SeaChoice in the iTunes store.

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www.livingoceans.org/donate