

THE PROFESSIONAL

Professional Employees Association | Volume 46 Issue 3

BC's Union for Professionals

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Depending on your perspective, 2020 is shaping up to be a year to remember or forget. All of us are learning and adapting to the uncertain environment of COVID-19 and its impacts on our lives. I thank you for your commitment to your work and your union and hope that you are able to maintain your health and work-life balance. As we head into the fall, I wanted to provide a brief update on the recent activities of the PEA.

Unfortunately, members at both St. Margaret's School and the University of Victoria have been impacted by layoffs. The PEA plays an important role to advocate for these members' rights during these challenging times. We are also hearing from our members that they are experiencing increased workloads, strain on mental health and well-being, and of course virtual-meeting fatigue. We want you to know that you are not alone in this and the union is here to support you and your unique circumstances. Please do not hesitate to contact your local rep or labour relations officer with any questions or concerns you may have.

Highlights of union activities:

- Economic recovery across the province
- Wage parity for government-funded lawyers
- Recruitment and retention concerns across chapters
- Adapting PEA business to the impacts of COVID-19
- Diversifying educational opportunities for our membership on important social topics

At this time, I would also like to affirm that the PEA is committed to creating and supporting union and workplace environments free of racism and violence. The PEA stands in solidarity with the Black community, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, the LGBTQIA2S+ community and all human rights and freedoms. Ultimately, all of us want to be valued for our skills and abilities and to work and play in safe environments that provide us with the resources and peace to blossom and grow. Everyone should be safe to be their true self. Please know that the PEA will always provide support and resources to anyone who feels vulnerable or at risk in their workplace. We are committed to equity, diversity and inclusion.

I hope that this summer gave you the chance to connect with family and friends in a safe way. Let's remember Dr. Bonnie Henry's mantra and make it our own: be kind, be calm, and be safe.

CHAMPIONING INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

PHOTO MICHAL UTKO, ORL



Congratulations to Okanagan Regional Library members Ashley Machum and Chris Stephenson, winners of the 2020 BCLA Champion of Intellectual Freedom Award.

The BC Library Association shared the following details about the award that was given to the ORL members in June:

“The award is given to an individual or organization that demonstrates significant advancement of intellectual freedom in the public realm for the benefit of British Columbians, or that champions intellectual freedom issues in their library, community, province, or country. Ashley and Chris hosted the first Drag Queen Story Time at the downtown Kelowna branch of the Okanagan Regional Library on September 14, 2019. The program was well attended, and well-received, but mounting the program was not without its challenges.

Whether or not to hold the Drag Queen Story Time raised several intellectual freedom discussions. Ashley is the Youth Services Librarian and Chris is the Head Librarian,

both for the Kelowna branch, and together they argued for the importance of listening to their community and standing by library values. They convinced skeptics that the tenets of intellectual freedom meant that the Drag Queen Story Time should be a welcome part of library programming, especially when such an event had the support of the local community.

Their hard work won the applause of their Library Board, the local media, and all the community members who attended the event. The effect of Ashley and Christopher’s work reverberates in the community and in the library.”

■ THE PROFESSIONAL

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

WORKING IN ANIMAL CARE SERVICES AT UVIC

WORDS & PHOTOS JORDANA WHETTER

It's often said that you're either a dog lover or a cat lover. You can't be both, unless you are PEA member Tracey Sutcliffe, a self-described animal lover who shares her home and looks after a cat, a barn cat (note the distinction), a dog, three horses, and five chickens and a rooster. She is also an animal health technician who supervises the animal husbandry team at the University of Victoria (UVic). Her team cares for all of the species used for research and teaching by feeding them, cleaning their enclosures, and ensuring every creature under their care is comfortable and well-cared-for. It's a job that suits Tracey perfectly.

"I was one of those incredibly lucky people who always knew what I wanted to do with my life," she says with a smile. "I was born to care for animals. To me, a rat or a mouse is just as cute and cuddly as a dog."

Animal Care Services (ACS) is the team that helps UVic researchers onsite in their biology, physics, immunology, biochemistry, and neuroscience labs by facilitating everything they need related to animal care. In addition to housing and caring for the animals, they also provide veterinary and diagnostic services. The facilities they oversee are under strict guidelines from the Canadian Council on Animal Care, and Tracey's team holds up these guidelines through the highest ethical and humane standards.

Their work plays an important role in supporting the diverse range of research at UVic, which is one of the reasons Tracey moved to research from veterinary care. With over 28 years of experience in the industry, she has spent more than half of her career in animal research and the last seven years as part of the ACS team at UVic.

Tracey describes one of the most memorable studies over the past few years involving a male plainfin midshipman fish (also known as a singing toadfish), who swims to the tideline on the shore, builds a nest, and then sings to attract his mate. The singing, which can last hours, sounds like a continuous drumming hum that can be quite loud, especially when mul-



ABOVE: PEA member Tracey Sutcliffe next to research tanks at UVic

tiple male fish are competing with each other. Once a female has been attracted, she lays her eggs in the nest the male fish has created and then immediately leaves.

But the story doesn't end there. Researchers have also studied the behavior of a smaller type of male toadfish, known as the sneaker fish, who can't be bothered to dig a nest, sing for a mate or look after his offspring. Instead, the sneaker fish enters the nest that the bigger toadfish has created for the female to lay her eggs in and fertilizes them himself. Then he sneaks away, leaving the unsuspecting bigger male to tend to eggs that are not his own.

"This fish is one of the few species where the male does all of the work," Tracey laughs. "Not only does he build the nest but he cares for the eggs and guards them until they are big enough to survive on their own."

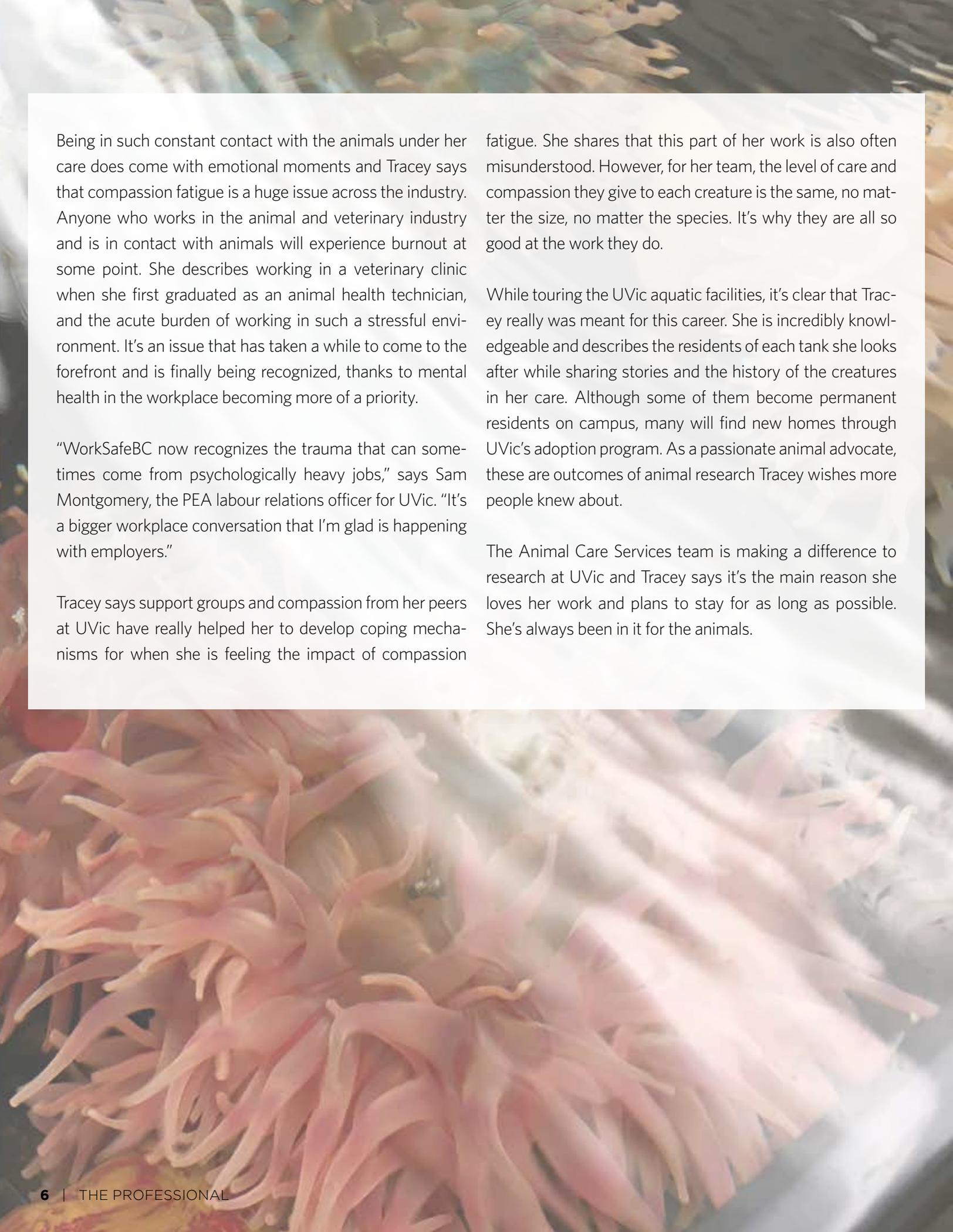
"Toadfish are amazing creatures that can breathe through their skin when they are exposed to air during

low tide. It was so interesting to learn all about their unique behaviors and care for them while they were at UVic."

Working in animal care is not a job that is frequently talked about, mainly because animal care facilities and the studies that take place using animals are often polarizing topics. But Tracey wishes that could change.

"There are definitely misconceptions about the work that happens in the animal care industry," Tracey says. "I wish that more people knew about the importance of the type of research we are supporting by caring for these animals, but I also wish they knew about the people who are caring for the animals."

"Anyone who does this job does it because of their pure love of animals. We know they are part of something bigger and without them, life-changing research couldn't move forward. This is why we handle and care for each animal with the utmost care and respect."



Being in such constant contact with the animals under her care does come with emotional moments and Tracey says that compassion fatigue is a huge issue across the industry. Anyone who works in the animal and veterinary industry and is in contact with animals will experience burnout at some point. She describes working in a veterinary clinic when she first graduated as an animal health technician, and the acute burden of working in such a stressful environment. It's an issue that has taken a while to come to the forefront and is finally being recognized, thanks to mental health in the workplace becoming more of a priority.

"WorkSafeBC now recognizes the trauma that can sometimes come from psychologically heavy jobs," says Sam Montgomery, the PEA labour relations officer for UVic. "It's a bigger workplace conversation that I'm glad is happening with employers."

Tracey says support groups and compassion from her peers at UVic have really helped her to develop coping mechanisms for when she is feeling the impact of compassion

fatigue. She shares that this part of her work is also often misunderstood. However, for her team, the level of care and compassion they give to each creature is the same, no matter the size, no matter the species. It's why they are all so good at the work they do.

While touring the UVic aquatic facilities, it's clear that Tracey really was meant for this career. She is incredibly knowledgeable and describes the residents of each tank she looks after while sharing stories and the history of the creatures in her care. Although some of them become permanent residents on campus, many will find new homes through UVic's adoption program. As a passionate animal advocate, these are outcomes of animal research Tracey wishes more people knew about.

The Animal Care Services team is making a difference to research at UVic and Tracey says it's the main reason she loves her work and plans to stay for as long as possible. She's always been in it for the animals.

MEMBERS ON THE FRONT LINES

WORKING DURING COVID-19

WORDS JORDANA WHETTER

In the months following the arrival of the pandemic, many PEA members were able to make a successful shift to home-based work. For others, whose jobs involve delivering essential services to clients in the community, adapting to COVID-19 has been a more involved process. For these members, the regular workday now involves conducting frequent risk assessments, following detailed infection control procedures, and adjusting to new technologies that are transforming how client services are delivered.

Health Science Professional (HSP) member Cindy Ashton is a home health physiotherapist in Langley who makes daily home visits to her clients. For Cindy, the pandemic protocols have meant having to add extra time to her visits for screening and managing protective equipment. Additional time is also needed for the paperwork following each appointment.

“Prior to COVID-19 I was able to complete 90 per cent of my assessment, charting, and paperwork during a client visit,” says Cindy. “Now I only do the assessment in person and although it is much shorter, there is a substantial amount of time spent after the appointment doing paperwork and completing follow-up items.”

Although some of her follow-up appointments have moved online using Zoom, most clients aren’t familiar with virtual technology and still need in-person care. However, Cindy has worked tirelessly to make online access easier for her clients, finding outline resources and exercise classes. She hopes these virtual options remain after the pandemic.

“Getting out of the house for an exercise class is often the sole physical barrier that my clients experience,” she says. “Although I provide them with physiotherapy exercises to complete, the next step is becoming more active. If my clients who are recovering from a stroke or living with Parkinson’s could continue to access online exercise classes, it could be really amazing for their recovery.”

Cindy says she also hopes some of the changes that have happened to her work remain after the pandemic, such as the ability to email exercise resources instead of mailing them or bringing them to the next scheduled appointment.

“The faster I can communicate with a client, the faster they can start to recover or regain their mobility,” she adds.

For HSP member Zaheen Rhemtulla, a clinical pharmacist at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam, the shift to using Zoom and teleconferencing for patient meetings has also been beneficial. As a hospital pharmacist, Zaheen’s focus is on the appropriate medication management and therapy for patients. She is continually assessing the patients’ clinical response to medication therapy. By reviewing individual patient charts, laboratory test results, and current research information and practice guidelines, she provides recommendations on treatment plan modifications in order to optimize patient care.

The risk of contracting and potentially spreading the virus within her workplace and personal circles is a constant stress for Zaheen, who works with a vulnerable patient population, many of whom have underlying conditions in addition to their severe mental illnesses.

“Many of my patients face compounded challenges that often include addiction to substances, chronic disease, poor access to health services due to social barriers, unstable housing, and a history of trauma or abuse,” she says. “My goal is always to try to understand these patients so that we can provide the trauma-informed care and evidence-based treatment they require in order to integrate successfully into society.”

Pre-COVID, Zaheen would typically visit each of her wards to receive updates on patients’ progress and follow up on any medication or therapy-related issues. This involved meeting with physicians, nurses, and other health care team members. Now many of these tasks are conducted by teleconference, or Zoom or e-mail.

“The move to virtual appointments and conversations has provided a good alternative to my work that requires



in-person interactions,” says Zaheen. “But I do find communicating face-to-face is more effective, especially for patient interaction since I’m able to also assess for side effects. But most importantly, talking with patients in-person builds a therapeutic alliance.”

Both Cindy and Zaheen say that COVID-19 has created more flexibility in their workplaces but it has also highlighted the need for better protocols and practices to improve hygiene and prevent the transmission of contagions. For the foreseeable future they will continue their work with as much physical distance as possible, while wearing appropriate personal protection equipment, and washing their hands again and again and again.

The PEA commends the work of all of our front line workers during the pandemic and thanks all of our members for their commitment to keeping BC safe.



Volunteering at YVR during COVID-19

At the height of the BC's pandemic in April, a call for volunteers went out to provincial government employees living in the lower mainland asking for their help at Vancouver International Airport over the Easter weekend. The province had set up a health checkpoint for travellers and was in need of volunteers to assist with screening and contact-tracing procedures for passengers arriving in BC. Many GLP members, including Tom Yacyshen, who works as a Senior Land and Resource Specialist at the South Coast Regional office in Surrey, wanted to help out and volunteered without reimbursement.

As part of the orientation, the volunteers were instructed on procedures for managing traveler lineups, recording traveller contact information, and reviewing self-isolation plans, all while maintaining safe vigilant physical distancing and using the proper protective equipment.

"This was during the early phase of the pandemic and it was a really great lesson on how focused you have to be to maintain a safe physical distance while also not touching surfaces or your own face," said Tom.

Tom says that he volunteered because it felt good to be part of something that was helping slow the spread of COVID-19. The health checkpoint process means the government can track returning travellers easily if they show symptoms after returning from their trip. British Columbia was the first province to set up such a checkpoint, providing a model for other provinces of how to implement airport screening.

"I feel lucky to be going through this pandemic in BC," Tom adds. "And the first thing I'm going to do when it is finally safe to travel is go visit my daughter in Ottawa."

SCIENCE INTEGRITY AT RISK IN BC

THE BELOW OP/ED APPEARED IN THE VANCOUVER SUN IN JUNE 2020

WORDS TEJ HEER AND KIMBERLY GIRLING, EVIDENCE FOR DEMOCRACY

Over the past months, COVID-19 has swept the globe, forcing governments to quickly develop policy solutions that protect and inform citizens and address complex questions. In the face of the pandemic, BC has done well. With strong public science leadership from Dr. Bonnie Henry, the province was among the first to flatten the curve, and now as we begin to reopen, BC is managing to keep infection rates low. But one thing is for certain: The critical role of science and evidence in informing these decisions is glaringly clear.

Scientists in the public service are fundamental to the COVID-19 response and will play a fundamental role in rebuilding our communities and the economy. But, to be effective, science must be well-supported, conducted without political interference, communicated effectively to decision-makers and the public, and implemented into policy transparently. Recent data suggests that this scientific capacity and integrity may be at risk in BC.

In a new report, Evidence for Democracy, with the Professional Employees Association, surveyed government scientific professionals about challenges to the BC public sector. In the survey, 48 per cent of scientific professionals identify that they lack sufficient resources to meet their ministry's scientific mandate. They highlighted hiring delays, an overwhelming workload, pay rates below industry standard, and a lack of qualified personnel as primary contributing factors. Many also feel limited in opportunities to attend professional development and academic conferences, often due to lack of time or funding, which lead to challenges to stay current in their field and complete cutting-edge research.

Alarmingly, many scientific professionals were concerned about political interference impacting effective evidence-based policy-making. In fact, 43 per cent believed their respective ministries' decision-making had been compromised by political interference, and 25 per cent had knowledge of information being suppressed or declined by their ministry. One indicated: "I have had recommendations and directions made based on scientific knowledge and best practices overturned because the MLA in the region did not like the repercussions (i.e. loss of votes)." Other surveyed professionals indicated that industry pressures can interfere with science-based policy. "Industry regularly applies pressure when engaging with government staff to soften the negative results of monitoring," one indicated. "Government managers are often reluctant to publish data that shows poor performance by industry," said another professional. Worryingly, 38 per cent of scientific professionals reported fearing retribution for speaking out publicly against policies that could be harmful to public interest.



BC's government scientific professionals are at the forefront of protecting natural resources, public health, and the economy. Restricting the effective use of science done by these professionals puts the people of BC at risk. Adding to the concern, these results show that despite recent efforts to build science capacity in the BC public service, the province hasn't come very far since a similar survey conducted in 2017. Fortunately, tangible solutions exist.

The creation of explicit scientific integrity and transparency policies, such as those seen at the federal level, would provide mechanisms to reduce political interference in policy development and allow scientists to speak out without retribution. In addition, updated hiring policies must be implemented to ensure ministries can meet their scientific mandates successfully and should include succession planning and measures

to reduce hiring delays. Finally, strengthening investments in resources, such as competitive hiring practices and funding for conferences, would allow research to be conducted at the cutting edge. As British Columbia rebuilds and reopens in the wake of COVID-19, now is the time to prioritize public sector science to ensure that science and evidence continue to guide decision-making as they have through this crisis.

Scientific professionals work hard to protect BC's people, resources, and economy. We must protect this work by building a system that values their contributions and allows them to continue to enrich and protect the lives of British Columbians.

Visit www.evidencefordemocracy.ca/en/research/reports/spotlight-integrity-update-state-science-british-columbia to read the full report.

UPDATE ON BCFED AFFILIATION

ALIGNING WITH UNIONS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

WORDS SCOTT MCCANNELL

PHOTOS JORDANA WHETTER

The British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFED) represents more than half a million workers in 52 unions and over 800 locals across the province, covering almost every aspect of the BC economy. In 2013 the PEA began a three-year trial affiliation with the BCFED, and in 2016 members voted 85 per cent in favour of full affiliation with BCFED and its parent organization, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

The focus of the BCFED is to bring unionized workers together as a unified voice to promote and advocate for workers' rights. This united voice has resulted in improvements to labour laws, picket-line support for PEA members during labour disputes (as infrequent as they are) and shared campaigns that help to raise public and government awareness of our members' issues and interests.

Last year, the PEA experienced directly the power of affiliation through a job action involving 26 staff lawyers from our Legal Aid BC (LABC) chapter. LABC lawyers serve on the front lines of justice by managing and staffing the province's ten legal aid centres, programs that provide vital access to legal services for British Columbians in need. In the fall of 2019, during negotiations for wage redress, LABC lawyers voted 100 per cent in support of strike action. Shortly after, the managing lawyers at each centre were deemed to be providing an essential service, meaning they couldn't participate in any picketing during the strike.

Despite their decreased numbers, the staff lawyers decided to go ahead with a picket of LABC's headquarters in downtown Vancouver. The strike action included a rally and media campaign focused on the lawyers' fight for wage parity with provincial Crown counsel.



ABOVE: BCFED President, Laird Cronk, speaks during the Legal Aid BC rally on November 1, 2019



ABOVE: BCGEU Treasurer, Paul Finch, speaking at the Legal Aid BC rally

On the day of the strike, the lawyers were surprised and humbled by the turnout of over 80 BCGEU members from the LABC headquarters building, who joined the picket line in solidarity. Combined with PEA staff and other local PEA members who joined as well, the lawyers held a successful one-day picket that garnered extensive media coverage.

Without the support of the BCFED and affiliated unions, our members would have been a small voice. Thankfully, that voice was amplified, and the results felt by the LABC staff lawyers.

Some other key reasons behind the PEA's decision to affiliate in 2016 include the protection we gain from being raided by other unions and the opportunities it provides for collaborating with other unionized professionals in BC, including health professionals, teachers and college instructors.

With affiliation, the PEA has a voice on the BCFED Executive Council, and our members participate on numerous committees, including the one that establishes shared goals and strategies for public sector bargaining. This is especially valuable given that approximately 90 per cent

of our members work in the public sector.

Through the BCFED's strike coordination process, we're able to give advance notice to our members of other unions' job actions.

This was the case during a strike of faculty members at the University of Northern BC in Prince George earlier this year, and during the prolonged Western Forest Products lockout on Vancouver Island. PEA members spent time on both picket lines, support that was received with thanks from the UNBC Faculty Association and United Steelworkers.

PEA members and staff also benefit from the number of high-quality training programs offered by the BCFED, often at little or no cost. Some recent examples include:

- A workshop by the BC Teachers' Federation on how they hosted a virtual AGM for their 40,000-plus members. This learning will be implemented in our planning for next year's virtual PEA convention.
- A workshop series in February for senior union leaders where we learned how different unions are responding to issues such as the effects of precarious employment, recent changes to WorkSafeBC, and the impact on unions of the Lobbying and Transparency Act. The workshops included sessions with federal and provincial politicians.
- An excellent workshop and set of resources delivered to PEA members during COVID-19 on the role of Occupational Health Committees in a pandemic.
- The Canadian Labour Council Winter School, offered each year at Harrison Hot Springs. Without exception, members who attended a week-long program report finding the experience to be inspiring, valuable

from a learning standpoint, and a great opportunity to build friendships and networks. You can read about their experiences in the April issue of *The Pro*.

Hopefully, BCFED affiliation continues to be a clear value proposition for PEA members. The dues costs for both the PEA and CLC in 2020 are anticipated to be \$52,000 (or approximately \$17.50 a member). Expenditures for Winter School and other directly related expenses are approved annually by the PEA Executive and were budgeted at \$35,500 for 2020. This amount does not include funds set aside for the cancelled CLC convention in Vancouver and the now virtual BCFED convention in December 2020.

With affiliation, the PEA enjoys opportunities to build relationships, collaborate, and learn best practices and to be part of a labour movement that supports each other and seeks to improve the working lives of affiliate members and all workers in BC.

PEA UPDATES

EXECUTIVE CHANGES

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Megan Nicholls as the new LSL representative and James Laitinen as the new ORL representative on the PEA's executive.

OPERATIONS UPDATE

The PEA office in Victoria remains closed and a future re-opening will be assessed based on the status of the pandemic. All services are being provided remotely and virtually (for example Labour Relations Officers are attending virtual hearings).

Executive standing and special purpose committees are continuing their work. The 2021 PEA Convention will be held virtually with further details to come.

CONGRATULATIONS

Wishing Charlie Klasen, a long-time member of the GLP, a very happy retirement. He worked in the Timber Pricing area for the last 16 years, the last five of which were as the Coast Senior Timber Pricing Forester at the Ministry and Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development in Victoria, his main responsibility being the Coast Appraisal Manual.

Charlie made a significant contribution to the PEA, volunteering for many gratifying years as a local rep, a PEA Executive member-at-large in the early 90s, and as a BCGEU shop steward in the formative decade before that.

After 36 years in Government he is looking forward to more of a "life/life" balance, spending more time with family, his partner Maureen and friends, and in the great outdoors enjoying hiking, canoeing and photography. A return to extensive world-wide travel will hopefully be back in the cards as well. Charlie told the PEA he really appreciated the opportunity to serve the union and its members, and wishes everyone at the PEA and all of his colleagues the very best. According to Charlie: "It has been a slice!" (No 'pizza' pun intended).

If you would like to acknowledge a retiring PEA member, please email jwhetter@pea.org

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VOLUNTEER

Can you spare an hour or two to act as a scrutineer for PEA online elections? Scrutineers oversee voting procedures and ensure that PEA policies are being followed. Training and union leave is provided. Email membership@pea.org to express your interest.

UPDATE US

Have you moved or changed your email address or phone number? Let us know! Change your details by logging in to pea.org, emailing us at membership@pea.org or calling 1-800-779-7736 ext. 200



BC's Union for Professionals

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