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*The subject who is truly loyal to the Chief Magistrate  
will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures. JUNIUS*

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## An environmental auditor

**I**N these environmentally parlous times, the *Show Boat* song asserting that "fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly" might well be amended to add: "And politicians gotta try to make them fish swim here, and those birds fly there."

We croon thus because everywhere we look, we see our elected leaders neck-deep in nature-management experiments in which good politics and good ecology apparently war.

How else do you explain why the East Coast cod didn't realize that Canadian politicians and bureaucrats had decided it was the patriotic duty of Canadian fish to multiply faster than all the world's fishermen could catch them? And it is not yet clear how well heavily logged British Columbia forests understand they are politically required to grow back in a manner both environmentally healthy and economically sustainable.

Theoretically, government scientists should mitigate these conflicts by objectively presenting nature's apolitical point of view. However, as a recent paper which appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* has pointed out, all sorts of political and economic pressures can militate against the independence of government scientists.

After documenting what it said were abuses in the objective evaluation of the East Coast cod and West Coast salmon fisheries, the paper's three university-based authors suggested that some kind of arm's-length relationship should separate the government's fish-science divisions from its fish-policy branch. They also recommended that both the available fish data and the scientific discussions surrounding them should be released so the public could see for themselves whether a given policy decision was scientifically defensible.

Not surprisingly, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has challenged the

veracity of the paper's central thesis. While we don't know precisely how conformist DFO's corporate culture is, our mouths don't exactly gape at the notion that even the most scrupulous government scientists would feel pressure to interpret data in a way which favoured voting fishermen over non-voting fish.

The question is what to do about it. The professors' arms-length suggestion seems a basically sound one to us. But there is no reason to restrict its application to the fisheries. Maybe all government scientists working in environmentally sensitive areas should work in quasi-independent organizations. However, even with that, we are not sure that the person on the street is going to be able to determine when good politics is also good science.

Therefore, we suggest that the federal government, in conjunction with the provinces, set up something we are calling an Environmental Auditor-General. What we want is for someone to have the mandate to — how shall we put this delicately — cut through the crap. In the same way that the Auditor-General presents a yearly report which regularlyounds us with examples of governmental stupidity and waste, so too we want an environmental b.s. detector.

We envision this office as even-handedly acerbic. If it makes no ecological sense to fly thousands of Toronto geese to New Brunswick where they may freeze to death in winter, let's hear it. If we are constructing wildlife refuges big enough to please local landowners but too small to sustain endangered populations, let's hear it.

We won't suggest who the first Environmental Auditor-General should be, but we are certain Mark Twain's Pudd'n-head Wilson has already enunciated the office credo: "When in doubt tell the truth."