

A major hydroelectric power project has been proposed for the Hamathko, Southgate and Orford rivers at the head of Bute Inlet in the northern and most remote area of the Sunshine Coast Forest District. This project involves 17 "run-of-the-river" generating stations, about 100 bridges and hundreds of kilometers of roads and transmission lines, all within areas of spectacular fish, wildlife and scenic values. (read the proponent's project description at the [BC EAO Project Information Center](#)).

The Bute project is big enough to trigger environmental assessment processes through the province's [BC Environmental Assessment Office](#) (BCEAO) and the federal government's [Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency](#) (CEAA). These agencies have asked for public comments on the project's draft Terms of Reference. The SCCA has responded with a [comprehensive submission](#). The public comment period has now closed but there are hundreds of submissions posted on the BC EAO website. Many of these are very astute; for examples, read the submissions of [Rupert Gail](#), of Harriot Bay and Mike Morrell, from Denman Island.



**Above:** Head of Bute Inlet. Homathko River in the foreground with the Southgate in the mid-ground and the Orford drainage in the upper right background. Photo courtesy of Damien Gillis.

## **About Environmental Assessment Processes**

Environmental assessment has a checkered history both in British Columbia and in Canada. To read about the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, its regulations and the Act itself, go to [agency's website](#). You can read about the BC Environmental Assessment Act at the [BCEAO website](#).

The BC Environmental Assessment Act was once a progressive piece of legislation that had the potential to deal with the environmental concerns of citizens. However, the Act was largely gutted by the provincial Liberal government in 2002. In our view, the BC EA Office now functions primarily as a government stakeholder helping project proponents to achieve a façade of accountability, i.e., an "Environmental Certificate". [West Coast Environmental Law](#) wrote a critique of the current Act ([Bill 38: The New Environmental Assessment Act](#)). It's very doubtful that the environmental questions we have about the Bute hydroelectric project will be properly addressed in a process lead by the BC EAO.

(Further comment and analysis coming soon.)



**Above:** Head of Bute Inlet with Homathko River in the foreground right. Photo courtesy of Damien Gillis.