No. 9 November 1984

Crown Corporations and Natural Resources Management

Introduction

In Canada's mixed economy, Crown corporations have traditionally played an important role as instruments of public policy. Occupying intermediate positions between government and industry, they must often pursue the divergent objectives of government policy on the one hand, and commercial viability on the other. Not surprisingly, such corporations have long been the subject of debate between the advocates and opponents of greater state activism in the economy. This debate has taken on a special significance in recent years, given the policy commitments by governments in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States to contain or reduce the direct involvement of the state in economic activity. In Canada, and even nore so in Britain, this has been reflected generally in a eassessment of the role of Crown corporations and specifically in a willingness to consider the option of privatization.

In the light of this trend, this issue of *Resources* features articles on two very different Crown corporations in the resources field. One corporation, Petro-Canada, was created in 1975 by a Liberal government and was built up in part through the acquisition of the assets of privately-owned firms, and now competes in the private sector with other companies. The other, the Saskatchewan Water Corporation (Sask Water), was formed more recently by a provincial Conservative government through the merging and reconstitution of several government agencies, and occupies a position which is virtually a monopoly.

The trend towards privatization differs in each case. The privatization of Petro-Canada is still no more than a possibility, but one that raises weighty questions about the degree of control and accountability that the government should retain over the policy-oriented functions of any reformed Petro-Canada, even assuming the divestment of its more commercial activities. By contrast, in the case of Sask Water, bodies that were previously government departments or agencies have now been given the form – or at least the appearance – of a private firm. The fact that Sask Water is subject to less immediate political control han its predecessors does not seem to disturb the dovernment that created it.

The opinions presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute.

In one case then, privatization of the Crown corporation is seen as a means of reducing state involvement in the economy, while in the other the *creation* of a Crown corporation is seen as a means of (in effect) "privatizing" functions formerly handled within the government bureaucracy. Taken together, the two articles provide an interesting update on developments in the use of Crown corporations in the resource sector.

Petro-Canada and Privatization

by Alastair R. Lucas Professor of Law The University of Calgary

Introduction

Recent events both in Canada and abroad have once again drawn attention to the purpose and structure of Petro-Canada. While Petro-Canada was rarely singled out in the recent federal general election campaign, there was debate about the purposes of Crown corporations generally. Concern was expressed about the large and growing number of such corporations, about their effectiveness, and about their accountability to government and, ultimately, to the people of Canada.

In particular, the idea of "privatization" – moving Crown corporations wholly or partially into private ownership – was discussed. Both Maurice Strong (who served as Petro-Canada's first Chairman) and Senator Michael Pitfield (who, as Clerk of the Privy Council, was in a senior policy position during the conception and establishment of Petro-Canada) suggested that Petro-Canada's original policy objectives might now be largely accomplished and that the time had come to consider some form of privatization. Even the current Chairman of Petro-Canada, Wilbert Hopper, has stated that the company is considering various financing alternatives, including sale of shares to the public.

U.K. Privatization: Britoil and Enterprise Oil

Canadian observers have shown considerable interest in the privatization policies and programs of the Conservative government in Britain. These have included division of the British National Oil Corporation, a fully state-owned corporation, into two parts: 1. a 100% state-owned oil marketing and supply agency and 2. a publicly-traded oil and gas exploration and production company, with a 49% retained government interest (Britoil).

More recently, a public share offering was made for Enterprise Oil Ltd., the company to which the exploration and production interests of British Gas Corp. had been transferred. Both the Britoil and Enterprise Oil privatizations encountered difficulties that are of interest in considering any privatization of Petro-Canada.

Statoil and Norwegian Oil Policy

In contrast to the British experience, other state petroleum corporations, far from being targeted for privatization, have been subjected to even tighter government control — of both policy and operations. This is the case with Statoil, the Norwegian national oil company. Moreover, in the recent Norwegian debate on proposed changes in Statoil's role as holder of direct government oil and gas interests ("state participation interests"), there was virtually no disagreement, either among political parties or among the public, with the basic policy of direct state participation in exploration and production through a state petroleum corporation.

Any proposals for privatization of Petro-Canada should involve careful consideration of the British and Norwegian experience. In addition, the two major French state companies – Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP) and Societé Nationale Elf Aquitaine (SNEA) also offer valuable insights. CFP is particularly interesting as a "societé mixt" – a publicly-traded corporation with a minority state interest.

Continued Policy Role versus Privatization

The BNOC-Britoil and British Gas - Enterprise Oil privatizations illustrate the essential incompatibility of governments' desire for both privatization and continued use of state oil companies as government policy instruments. Fifty-one per cent of Enterprise shares were offered to the public through City of London underwriters. The prospectus reflected the government's policy that, at least initially, Enterprise should remain an independent – *i.e.*, widely held – private corporation.

At the time of the public offering, in June 1984, the oil market was extremely soft, and only about 12% of the shares were taken up. When Rio Tinto Zinc Ltd. (RTZ) then made an offer for 49% of the shares, the government was faced with a dilemma. While in the circumstances attractive, the offer raised obvious conflicts with the stated policy of ensuring Enterprise's "independence". To this end, the government had retained the right to limit the number of shares that could be taken by a single purchaser. It had also retained a "golden share" under which, until 1988, the government could exercise a vote of 50% + 1 if any party held, or attempted to acquire, over 50% of issued shares – thus blocking any takeover attempt.

Following rather anxious consideration, the government reduced the maximum RTZ share purchase to 10%. RTZ then acquired an additional 5% on the first day of trading, then subsequently increased its holding to 29.9% — the maximum permitted under City rules without making a full takeover bid.

These events generated considerable controversy. City of London financial officials were highly critical of the government's actions. The government's reluctance to agree to RTZ's 49% offer had placed it in the position of a forced seller – a position unlikely to ensure maximum market price. And the government was taken to task in the pres and by the political opposition for inconsistency – pursuing privatization, while at the same time attempting to retain control of the company as a kind of policy instrument in the oil and gas sector. The clear lesson appears to be that privatization objectives must be clear and not potentially inconsistent.

Clarification of National Objectives – Compagnie Française des Pétroles

Governments must also be aware that a minority holding in a privatized corporation will not automatically ensure continued policy direction. In fact, the likelihood is much greater that commercial considerations will quickly come to prevail. This is borne out by French experience, particularly with the Compagnie Française des Pétroles. CFP established in 1924 to manage assets of the Turkish Petroleum Co. ceded to France following the first world war, was constituted as an ordinary joint-stock company, with a minority government holding. This corporate form was more an accident of the circumstances and of the individuals involved than a conscious policy choice. Subsequently, the government established controls over financial matters and management appointments that appeared to make CFP primarily an instrument of government policy.

However, studies have concluded that, in fact, private sector directors dominated CFP policy and decision-making. The passivity of state-appointed directors, and the greater clarity and immediacy of balance-sheet objectives, resulted in CFP becoming essentially indistinguishable from major petroleum companies in the private sector. This meant, for example, that in the 1973 Algerian nationalization of foreign oil and gas interests, the Algerian government was able credibly to claim that nationalization of assets of CFP was not an act hostile to the French state.

This French experience again underlines the essential incompatibility of a continued role as an instrument of government policy with the ordinary commercial objectives expected of "independent" privatized corporations. It also suggests the desirability of splitting functions to make public policy responsibilities clear – as was done, for example, with petroleum marketing and offshore purchasing in the case of the new BNOC. Petro-Canada has already divided functions somewhat along these lines to distinguish essentially commercial operations (Petro-Canada Exploration Ltd.) from government policy functions (Petro-Canada International Ltd. for offshore purchasing, and Petro-Canada International Assistance Ltd. for technical assistance to third-world states).

Who Makes Policy – Government or National Oil Company?

The debate in Norway concerning the future of Statoil happroduced a committee report followed by a white paper, followed by policy and legislative changes. The problem here is not ideological. Nor are there serious disputes concerning relative efficiency of public and private enterprise.

Everyone, including the political opposition, agrees on the fundamental purposes of Statoil, namely:

- To assist in capturing for the state a major part of the income from petroleum activities; and
- 2. To facilitate public regulation and control of the petroleum industry and to maximize Norwegian benefits from petroleum operations.

Statoil has both commercial and regulatory objectives. The principal operational means for achieving these objectives is the vesting in Statoil of the 50-80% state-participation interest provided for under the Norwegian licensing regime. Unlike Petro-Canada and BNOC, Statoil is not the creation of a special statute. Rather, it is an ordinary public corporation incorporated under the companies legislation, but wholly owned by the state. A somewhat paradoxical result of this formal similarity with private-sector oil and gas corporations is that the government, acting as shareholder through the responsible minister at the general meeting, exercises tighter control than is the case for many other national oil companies, including Petro-Canada.

In Norway, however, the perception is that this control is not tight enough. Moreover, there is a desire within government to channel Statoil's gross income directly into the public treasury, rather than relying on the government's right as shareholder to net profits. This implies greater direct government control over management decisions and, consequently, a greater direct government role in joint-venture decisions to which Statoil is a party. The government also wants more direct control of Statoil decisions related to purchase of Norwegian goods and services, and of decisions that may affect Norwegian nternational relations.

Norwegian oil activity already accounts for approximately 18% of GNP, with production expected to increase over the next 10-15 years. Under the government's state participation policy, Statoil has become a major interest -holder. While it was responsible for 10% of Norway's 1983 oil production, its share is expected to increase by the year 2000 to two-thirds. By 1990 Statoil is projected to account for 15% of Norway's GNP - nearly equivalent to the total contribution of the remainder of Norwegian industry. Thus, the petroleum industry, now largely foreign-controlled, will become increasingly dominated by the state corporation, until government regulation and control of the sector become nearly synonymous with regulation and control of state participation through Statoil. An obvious possibility is that these regulatory and fiscal powers may effectively pass out of government hands and into those of Statoil's management. It is a classic example of a problem of public accountability.

The reform now being implemented involves transfer of the greater part of the state-participation interest (the ratio may vary from field to field) from Statoil to the state itself. This is combined with adjustment of voting rules both within the company (at general meetings) and for the joint ventures (involving state-participation agreements with private-sector companies), with a view to increasing and confirming overnment control over matters of policy as opposed to ordinary operational decisions.

Conclusion

Petro-Canada is a very long way from the sectoral and

national economic dominance that Statoil is developing. However, if the Conservative government retains some form of the National Energy Program's 25% Crown share, Petro-Canada's role could increase dramatically. Its major role in the maximization of Canada benefits, and the possibility of its becoming a dominant operator in frontier areas, could give rise to similar issues. In these circumstances, it may be asked whether public-policy decisions are being made by responsible government officials or by Petro-Canada management. The lesson is that these potential problems of economic dominance and policy accountability must not be forgotten when the role of Petro-Canada is examined in the context of proposals for privatization.

A second lesson from Norway concerns the extent to which the new voting procedures inject the government into joint -venture decision-making. Statoil is authorized to vote the government share in joint-venture management committees, but, where policy issues are considered to be involved, only upon instruction of the Minister through the general meeting. As suggested above, the intention is to leave Statoil with freedom of action on operational decisions, but to ensure government direction on policy matters. However, since without the government interest Statoil will represent a distinct minority in joint-venture voting, there will be clear incentive for Statoil to bring issues to the general meeting for government direction.

The problem is that while government has its control mechanism, it may be partially at the expense of efficiency in operational decision-making. Specifically, private companies in joint ventures may find themselves affected by non-commercial factors brought into operating decisions by this particular Statoil-government nexus. It has been pointed out that ideally any process created to ensure accountability of a national oil company should be designed to minimize effects on private-sector technical and commercial decisions.

Privatization then should not merely be an exercise in selling assets or issuing shares to the public. It must involve a very careful and complete planning process, beginning with a clear identification of objectives. Hard choices must be made if government is anxious to retain some control of the privatized company, whether as an instrument of energy policy, or for other reasons. This is demonstrated by the Britoil and Enterprise Oil privatizations in the U.K., and by the evolution of the French "mixed-enterprise" corporation, Compagnie Française des Pétroles.

If government is to retain policy direction in certain areas only, this must be spelled out and structured in a way that does not damage commercial operations of the privatized corporation. This is shown in a different context by the Norwegian financial and voting reforms for Statoil. Ultimately, division along functional lines into state corporations — such as the petroleum-marketing instrument, BNOC — and widely held publicly traded corporations — such as the exploration and production company, Britoil — may be the most viable privatization format.

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The Saskatchewan Water Corporation

There have been major changes this year in the water legislation of Saskatchewan. The main innovation is a new Crown corporation, the Saskatchewan Water Corporation, but that is not the only change; all of the Province's water resources statutes have been re-shaped. There are apparently two main purposes. The first is to bring together all water-related legislation and agencies under one roof in order to facilitate the implementation of water programs and water projects. The second is to establish the Corporation as a vehicle for long-term financing, more suitable than a government department for borrowing and budgeting over a number of years.

The Water Corporation Act (S.S. 1983-84, c.W-4.1) establishes the Water Corporation, with all the usual powers of a Crown corporation to contract and hold property in its own name as an agent of the Crown. It has extensive borrowing powers and is able to enter into a variety of financial and corporate arrangements. Its general purposes to manage, administer, develop, control and protect water resources, to promote efficient use, and to enhance the quality and availability of water for all purposes. Thus it has the general duties of carrying out studies, programs, works and giving advice on water resources to the Cabinet. The Minister in charge is the Minister of Energy and Mines.

The Corporation's functions fall into three categories. Its primary role is to take initiatives in the financing, construction and operation of works for water supply, drainage and sewage treatment. The Corporation will co-operate with local bodies by supplying water or water works under agreements, or by helping to upgrade facilities. However, the Corporation may acquire works itself, and has the exclusive right to supply or extend the supply of water or works into presently unserviced areas. In carrying out this work, the Corporation will be consolidating services previously supplied under several different Acts. It will also be exercising the new capabilities conferred on it by its entrepreneurial structure and borrowing powers.

The Corporation's second function is the general supervision and regulation of all water supply and sewage treatment works, regardless of who builds them. There are detailed procedures for the approval of works, at both the construction and operation stages. Thus, the Act seeks to bring the developer and the regulator of these works together within

ne organization. However, the Corporation must send copies of all applications to the Minister of the Environment, who may then impose conditions or exercise a veto.

The Corporation's third function is the administration of water rights. It is now the Corporation, rather than the

Minister, who decides whether or not to grant the use of surface water or ground water. The Water Power Act and the Ground Water Conservation Act continue with few changes apart from the transfer of responsibility to the Corporation. However the Water Rights Act, which is more significant legislation, has been repealed, and the new regime in the Water Corporation Act is very different. Existing water rights are preserved, but gone is the key principle that licences have priority according to time, with junior licensees being cut off if need be to preserve flows to prior-established licensees. Saskatchewan's water law can no longer be described as a prior appropriation system, and senior licensees no longer have the security of supply that they once had. Gone too is the rule against granting water rights that would deprive domestic users of their water supply, and so is the provision for compulsory transfers of water licences to higher uses, with domestic use at the top of the order of precedence and mineral extraction at the bottom. Since the new regime does not make new rules to stand in the place of these deleted rules, the administrative discretion in the hands of the Corporation has been widened. The old Regulations, however, are still in effect.

The Corporation's decisions on the granting of water rights are subject to appeal to the new Water Appeal Board. The previous power of cancelling water rights if it is in the public interest continues for old rights, but a right issued under the new Act may be cancelled (subject to an appeal) only if there is a breach of its terms, or if the Corporation considers that the licensee no longer requires the right. Hence, there will be fewer grounds on which to limit water use once a right is granted. Nothing is said about the transferability of water rights.

The general responsibility for water quality and the control of pollution remains with the Minister of the Environment. His powers have been consolidated and enlarged in the new *Environmental Management and Protection Act.* As well as the previously-mentioned power to object to applications for water or sewage works, the Minister has broad powers to control or close down works, if that is necessary to protect the environment or public health, and to take emergency measures to prevent pollution. The Minister also regulates industrial pollution directly, under new provisions.

The Water Corporation is actually very similar to the Ontario Water Resources Commission that operated from 1956 to 1972, with similar structure and duties, and with powers to borrow money for the construction of water projects. The main difference is that the OWRC received no outside supervision of water quality the way that the Water Corporation does. The OWRC was dissolved as part of a wide governmental re-organization, rather than through any disaffection with it. Its work was taken over by the new Ministry of Environment which was formed to make one agency directly accountable to a minister for all environmental matters.

It remains to be seen how Saskatchewan's new system will work, and whether it will be an improvement over the previous one. The Water Corporation should be effective as a single agency for the building of water supply and sewage treatment projects, although the Ontario experience indicates that a government department may in fact be quite capable of handling long-term financing. In other

aspects, however, there are weaknesses in the re-organization that put its usefulness into question.

The first problem is hesitancy about authority over water quality. The intent seems to have been to leave responsibility for water quality in the hands of the Minister of the Environment, but in truth, it is split right down the middle. The Minister licenses industrial effluent works, while the Corporation licenses sewage works (subject, certainly, to the Minister's approval). The Corporation supervises or builds works for water supply and treatment, while the Minister is responsible for the quality of the natural waters from which they draw. They are both carrying out work that will demand data and research on water quality. One possibility is that the Corporation will have to go to the Ministry for water quality advice.

To the extent that jurisdiction over water quality is actually kept out of the Corporation's mandate, a second weakness is apparent. It seems undesirable to separate the management of the use of quantities of water from the management of the quality of water. For one thing, the separation contradicts the stated goal of bringing all water -management agencies under one body. For another, the realities of resource management require the two functions to be brought together. For example, acceptable water quality often depends on there being sufficient flow left in a river to provide for the dilution and transport of effluent. At least under the previous system responsibilities for both quality and quantity rested in the one Ministry. Some of the country's more progressive water regimes, such as the Northern Inland Waters Act, attempt to integrate, rather than to separate, the two aspects of water administration.

A more fundamental form of the same problem lies in the thinking behind the Water Corporation. The philosophy seems to be that resource use and environmental protection are quite unrelated. Water resources management is conceived to be a matter of financing and engineering, independent of the state of the environment. Environmental protection is seen as something that can be dealt with by other people, once the project decisions have been made. Thus the planning on a project carried out by the Corporation, or under its supervision, would be virtually complete before the application process would formally notify it to the Ministry of the Environment. The Ministry would then have only 45 days to respond – far too little time to carry out an environmental impact process should one be required. Most governments and resource companies have come to understand that environmental impact must be considered at all stages of project planning, not just towards the end. Environmental quality is directly linked with resource use and engineering, especially in the case of water. Thus, the quality of a supply of natural water will strongly influence the costs of running a treatment plant that draws on it.

Finally, the Water Corporation will have to deal with conflicts between its interests as entrepreneur and as regulator. As an entrepreneur and water user, the Corporation has business goals to pursue. It will have to minimize its costs. Yet at the same time it will be exercising statutory powers over other users seeking access to the same water supplies, and in doing so it will have to act fairly. Being fair to other parties may conflict with the Corporation's own business preferences. It is peculiar, even disquieting, to find a corporate board sitting as judges of the water and drainage rights of individuals, especially when it has its own interests

to consider. The existence of a right of appeal does little to rectify the situation. Moreover, certain significant powers of the Corporation cannot be appealed, such as cancelling old water rights or prohibiting the building of works other than water works as defined by the Act.

All in all, the inspiration for the Water Corporation seems to come from concerns about the building and funding of water projects. It may well facilitate those projects. But the changes accompanying its creation go much further, altering the whole system of water management in Saskatchewan. It is not entirely clear that the changes will be for the better.

Barry Barton

Postscript

Issue No. 8 of *Resources* (August 1984) contained an article by Andrew R. Thompson entitled "Contractual v. Regulatory Models for Major Resources Development Projects". It should be noted that the agreement between Dome Petroleum Limited and the Lax KW'ALAAMS Band Council referred to in Dr. Thompson's article has been filed before the National Energy Board, with a request from the two parties that it be made a condition of the Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity. The Board's decision on this request is, however, still pending.

Contract Law for Oil and Gas Personnel

At the request of Mobil Oil Canada, Ltd., the Institute recently presented a two-day course on contract law to twenty-five non-lawyers in the company who deal extensively with contracts. The course examined such issues as how a contract is formed and terminated, judicial approaches to the interpretation of contracts, and the calculation of damages. In addition, a number of clauses commonly found in petroleum industry contracts were scrutinized (including *force majeure*, independent contractor, choice of laws, liability and indemnity, and confidential information). Materials prepared by the Institute for the course draw upon Canadian cases involving the petroleum industry.

The course was presented by Nicholas Rafferty, who teaches contract law in The University of Calgary's Law Faculty, and Constance Hunt, Executive Director of the Institute. Other companies interested in this type of course for their staff should contact the Executive Director.

CIRL Essay Prize

The Institute recently awarded its annual essay prize, in the amount of \$1,000, to Ms. Patricia Wagers for her paper entitled "The Status of the *Usque Ad Medium Filum* Rule and the Doctrine of Accretion in Alberta". Ms. Wagers holds a B.Sc. from The University of Calgary and a B.Ed. degree from The University of Alberta. She is currently a third-year law student at The University of Alberta, and will commence articling with the Alberta Attorney General in July 1985.

Seven essays were submitted for review by a Selection Committee comprised of P. Donald Kennedy, Q.C., Sunco. Inc., Calgary (Chairman); Sheilah Martin, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, The University of Calgary; and Donald MacFarlane, Q.C., formerly of Mobil Oil Canada, Ltd.

The Institute would like to note its appreciation to members of the Selection Committee, and to extend its congratulations to Ms. Wagers. Deadline for submission of essays for 1985 is June 30.

Publications

Fairness in Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Processes, Proceedings of a Seminar, The Banff Centre, February 1-3, 1983; Evangeline S. Case, Peter Z.R. Finkle and Alastair R. Lucas, eds. Proceedings 2. ISBN 0-919269-08-7. 125 p. \$15.00.

The object of the Seminar was to promote a critical review of fairness in environmental and social assessment processes by the major affected interests - assessment agencies, industry, government, and public or special interest groups. From this review, fundamental requirements for procedural and substantive fairness in assessment processes can be identified.

The overall introduction to the proceedings identifies basic elements of fair assessment procedure, including: openness, absence of bias or predecision, flexibility, explicitness of assumptions, early discussion of procedural needs of the particular process, provision of costs to public participants, time limitations on proceedings, and written decisions by assessment agencies.

Three keynote papers provide an overview of the issues: the basic question of the value of procedural fairness, the legal doctrine of procedural fairness and its potential application to assessment procedures, and the political utility of fairness in environmental and social impact assessments.

The remaining papers review the fairness of existing environmental and social assessment processes: the Ontario Environmental Assessment Process, the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process, National Energy Board procedures, the Nova Scotia Uranium Inquiry, the Quebec Environmental Assessment Process, and public inquiries generally. A more general paper deals with issues in the review of assessment system policies. Strengths and weaknesses were identified in all of the environmental assessment processes. Particular problems were noted with the idea of self-assessment by project proponents, availability of information to participants, and extension of assessment to related issues where the process is "the only game in town".

In a concluding section synthesizing the results of the Seminar, the commentators identified two major themes: first, that the ultimate decisions on proposals are political, not administrative or regulatory; and, second, that it is difficult or impossible to separate environmental, social, and moral/ethical issues.

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A Guide to Appearing before the Surface Rights Board of Alberta, by Laureen Ridsdel and Richard J. Bennett. Working Paper 1. 1982. ISBN 0-919269-04-4. 70 p.

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Petroleum Operations on the Canadian Continental Margin -The Legal Issues in a Modern Perspective, by Ian Townsend Gault. Canadian Continental Shelf Law 1; Working Paper 2.

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Acid Precipitation in North America: The Case for Transboundary Cooperation, by Douglas M. Johnston and Peter Finkle. 1983. ISBN 0-919269-02-8. 75 p.

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Canadian Electricity Exports: Legal and Regulatory Issues,

by Alastair R. Lucas and J. Owen Saunders, Working Paper 3. 1983. ISBN 0-919269-09-5. 40 p.

\$7.50

Canadian Maritime Law and the Offshore: A Primer,

by W. Wylie Spicer. Canadian Continental Shelf Law 3; Working Paper 6. 1984. ISBN 0-919269-12-5. 65 p.

\$11.00

Resources: The Newsletter of the Canadian Institute of Resources Law. ISSN 0714-5918. Occasional

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