

Comox need not fear Ceta, says staff

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Comox has little to fear from the proposed Canada/Europe Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), according to a report from the Town's chief administrative officer, Richard Kanigan.

Kanigan's report was in response to a February presentation from Alex Turner, a representative from the local chapter of the Council of Canadians.

Turner warned that the agreement would have severe consequences for local governments' ability to contract out services to local providers, as well as open the door to privatization of sewer and water delivery.

But Kanigan said both the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) had both taken strong positions on the trade agreement.

"FCM has received assurance in November 2009 from the federal Minister of International Trade that CETA 'will not affect the ability of municipalities to regulate, and to introduce and amend regulations to meet policy objectives,'" Kanigan wrote in his report.

"This was stressed again in an August 2011 letter from current Minister Ed Fast, stating 'municipalities would retain the ability to use various instruments to promote local economic development,'" he continued. Kanigan also noted the UBCM had been advised by provincial government that they would be able to participate in ongoing CETA negotiations. Although he acknowledged that CETA would require full EU access to local government contracts "over a certain threshold," Kanigan said municipalities would still be able to specify certain services criteria, such as quality, price, experience, or "social and environmental factors," so long as they were applied in a "nondiscriminatory manner."

"In conclusion, it would be very difficult for local governments to award contracts for goods and services without some local component," Kanigan said in the report.

"To highlight, a couple of examples would include transit, where drivers would need to be employed locally, or the provision of a vehicle, which would be difficult to supply without local expertise in safety and maintenance standards." The report has also been forwarded to the Comox Valley Regional District.