

Don't Dump Iron – Dump Rogue Climate Schemes

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The press release had a pretty stark headline: "Haida Announce Termination of Russ George." If the name sounds familiar its because he is the Californian businessman who last year led the world's largest, and unapproved, geoengineering (climate manipulation) scheme to dump over 100 tonnes of iron into the Pacific ocean west of Haida Gwaii in British Columbia. Dubbed a "geo-vigilante" by The New Yorker and a "rogue" geoengineer by almost everyone else (including the World Economic Forum and Canada's environment minister Peter Kent), George was the guy who persuaded the small impoverished indigenous community of Old Massett on Haida Gwaii to part with over \$2.5-million. He did so under the pretense that dumping iron in the ocean to stimulate a plankton bloom would net lucrative profits in the carbon credit market and maybe even bring back salmon stocks.

As countless press articles and a CBC documentary subsequently exposed, this rogue "ocean fertilization" scheme was not the first time Mr. George had misled well-meaning people. On one occasion he even led the Vatican into accepting carbon credits backed by a forest that never existed. Despite massive opposition from oceanographers, the environmental community, and an international treaty, and strong concern from residents of Haida Gwaii itself, including the Council of Haida Nations, the chief councillor of Old Massett bizarrely stood by Russ's ocean dumping dream - until it seems last week when, unexpectedly, George was "terminated."

Not "Termination" of the killer robot variety - just a summary sacking as a director and officer of the corporation. Curiously Russ George contends they can't really fire him, claiming that he owns 48% of the company - a telling detail for a company that always claimed to be a wholly indigenous enterprise. According to the other 52% of the Haida Salmon Restoration Corp. (HSRC), the termination is to be accompanied by an internal restructuring of the company that George previously ran from his Vancouver office. There is also an upcoming closed meeting for Old Massett community residents (Monday evening) - presumably to finally explain what really happened to the \$2.5-million taken from them and how they will get it back.

"The board and our community has decided to recalibrate this business so that it moves forward in a constructive fashion and effectively responds to legitimate concerns raised by various stakeholders around the world" explains the corporation's press release.

It is interesting to speculate about why the remaining 52% of HSRC finally decided to admit that the global chorus of concern was after all legitimate - having previously dismissed it as "black propaganda." Russ George may be a master storyteller, but maybe they finally saw through the fictions he seems to weave around himself; or maybe it's just a prudent business move to dump a toxic asset in advance of upcoming court cases.

Either way, it's an incomplete move. In booting out George, HSRC has crowned Old Massett bureaucrat John Disney in his place as the leader of the company - in effect replacing tweedledum with tweedledee. Disney, who like George is also not Haida, appears to have been Russ George's right-hand man on the islands for some years now. Together they proposed a \$4.5-million carbon credit scheme back in 2006 that never got off the ground. It was Disney who actually sold the ocean dumping scheme to Old Massett council, and when news of the dump hit the headlines it was Disney who stood up in front of the world's press while George himself hid from the spotlight. But Disney also did some creative storytelling of his own. He told villagers that they would receive \$8.5-million from carbon credits in the first year - even though no credible carbon credit broker would ever truck in ocean fertilization. Disney told CBC Radio's "As it Happens" that the UN's Rio+20 conference had reversed the international moratorium on Ocean fertilization. It did nothing of the sort. Disney also claimed that seven different Canadian government departments knew about the iron dump and were fine with it - which they all deny.

His elevation to company leader also perpetuates what appears to be an unsettling conflict of interest. Disney is a public official whose salary is paid for with Canadian taxes. He used his public salaried position as Economic Development officer to set up a private company which we now know was largely controlled by an off-islands

American businessman and of which he was then President and now CEO. There should be an investigation into how government funds were spent to prop up this company and what monies Disney and George received.

Most worryingly though is that HSRC haven't yet dumped what they most need to offload: namely, their support for geoengineering. Their business plan is still to seed the ocean with iron. Despite all the outcry and an ongoing Environment Canada investigation, HSRC's lawyer Joe Spears told media last month that the company plans to be back out on the water this June to dump again.

Before ETC Group unmasked HSRC's activities in October last year, the Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation had spun a good line to government agencies that it was simply an indigenous science project investigating the health of the ocean - all the while concealing its ocean fertilization plans. It's a shame that wasn't what HSRC really was doing. A genuine indigenous-led ocean science team dedicated to understanding the ocean (rather than manipulating it for profit) would be a very welcome development. Maybe in their upcoming "re-calibration," HSRC's chastened management can consider that as a better and more honest mission. Losing the rogue geoengineer may be good for optics, but it is a meaningless step unless they also jettison his junk visions to manipulate the oceans and climate.

UPDATE: Old Massett Chief Councillor Ken Rea has now told the Victoria Times Colonist that HSRC may indeed consider abandoning ocean fertilization altogether:

"The strategic review means that the second iron fertilization test, planned for June, will not take place, Rea said. "I can't say if it will be done again ever. I won't know until we get the results of the strategic review," he said.