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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
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February 26, 2021

Dear Minister,

Over the last three decades Canada has neglected fresh water. The last Water Policy was released in the late 1980s. Since that time, federal-provincial agreements to cooperate in flood management and mitigation have been abandoned. The number of scientists working in the federal government to monitor and protect freshwater resources have been dramatically reduced. Our shared work with the United States, provinces and states that border the Great Lakes have been similarly reduced and under-resourced.

We need to provide resources to freshwater science and policy at the federal level through the focal point of the promised new Canada Water Agency. Our top recommendation is for adequate funding in the 2021 budget to get the Canada Water Agency launched.

The key point in this brief is that Canada does not need to re-invent the wheel. We need to go back through our history as a federal government to rebuild what we once had. To do that, I recommend that the retired Environment Canada experts be asked to provide advice. Dr. Jim Bruce and Mr. Ralph Pentland are both in Ottawa and represent an irreplaceable brain trust of detailed knowledge of what we once had that has been lost.

In framing these obligations, I present this brief starting at global responsibilities, then domestic, bilateral and inter-provincial.

Global freshwater responsibilities

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a clear 2030 agenda that must be applied both globally and domestically. Sustainable development is impossible without the availability and sustainable management of water for all. This is clearly outlined in goal number six. The remaining seventeen goals will only be achieved by improving global water management. Canada has committed to delivering on these goals.



If the federal government is truly committed to becoming a global leader in freshwater technology, then Canada must invest into research and development that promotes the sustainable use of freshwater. These innovations and technologies must inform federal water policies and management approaches.

Enhancing Canada's domestic capacity to protect freshwater

The government must review Canada's current federal water-focused policies and laws in order to identify any deficiencies. This is long overdue. The federal government must present an updated piece of legislation that protects and responsibly manages Canada's freshwater. All federal policies must be assessed, not only the Canada Water Act. This comprehensive review could be carried out by the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Canada must stop neglecting freshwater policy.

As a part of this review, the Canada Water Act must be updated to ensure that water is adequately managed for all. This must be done in collaboration with provinces, territories and Indigenous governments. Indigenous peoples must play a substantial role in co-drafting legislation, to ensure that Indigenous water rights and self-determination are respected. The updated Canada Water Act, and all other federal laws and policies, must be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The federal government must conduct an interdepartmental reorganization, in which the various water units dispersed throughout numerous federal departments are consolidated into the Canada Water Agency. The foundational units of the Canada Water Agency should be the National Hydrological Service (NHS) and the Water Science and Technology Directorate (WST). Other departments, such as Natural Resources Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada, contain key water units that must be integrated into the Canada Water Agency.

Bi-lateral freshwater responsibilities

Water does not respect physical, political or socio-economic boundaries. For this reason, the federal government must steward and strengthen its transboundary and bi-lateral water management arrangements, such as the 1909 Canada-US Boundary Waters Treaty.

Canada and the new US administration have an ideal opportunity to refresh and revitalize our shared work. The 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty gives us a framework. We need more investment and attention to the International Joint Commission. We need to increase the attention paid to the climate-related threats to shared water bodies, particularly in the Great Lakes.

An important objective of Canada's bi-lateral water management agreements must be to ensure that river basins are kept healthy and restored where needed. Canada must be equipped to anticipate, investigate, avoid and resolve water disputes.

Inter-provincial freshwater responsibilities

Protecting Canada's freshwater requires inter-provincial collaboration. Provincial, regional and Indigenous governments must work together to identify priority areas for watershed restoration and must have freshwater management plans that are coordinated.

Economic sectors that operate inter-provincially must work collaboratively to manage freshwater resources. Canada's agricultural sector must prioritize sustainable agriculture and water and soil conservation. By doing so, Canada's agricultural sector can contribute to climate change adaptation and to the responsible management of freshwater resources.



The climate emergency

The reality is that the climate emergency means that Canada must be prepared for more extreme weather patterns and events. Water is both a resource and a threat. Increased floods and droughts; harmful algae blooms as a result of fluctuating temperatures; and increased conflict related to future water supplies will require Canada to have an effective management system.

The federal government must invest in research for collecting water information and implement a coordinated observation, modeling and prediction framework to provide standardized data for flood, drought and climate forecasting.

Canada's national water quantity and quality monitoring networks must be updated. Data must be effectively shared across all levels of government and outside of the government. Communities, businesses, local farmers, regional policymakers and Canadian citizens must have access to information in order to strengthen Canada's resilience in the face of extreme events.

On behalf of the Green Party caucus, we have urged the Minister of Finance to ensure robust funding for the creation of the Canada Water Agency. We have identified that the CWA will need at least \$170 million per year to rebuild and maintain capacity.

Assuming that approximately \$100 million per year can be found within existing budgets, such as Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and a few others, we urge the budget to include at least \$70 million per year in new money to deliver on the promise of a strong Canada Water Agency.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Many thanks,



Elizabeth May, O.C.
Member of Parliament
Saanich-Gulf Islands
Parliamentary Leader of the Green Party of Canada

cc: The Honourable Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

