

Alternative Mandate Letter on Water

Send this letter asking the government to establish the Ministry of Water to protect water as a public trust and a human right by implementing and reinforcing the human right to water and sanitation; to end all drinking water advisories short and long term; to put an end to bottled water exports and remove water from the list of tradable goods in all trade agreements; and to declare ground and surface water a public trust.

November 19, 2019

TO: The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

CC: Prime Minister Trudeau and your Member of Parliament

To: The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change

Congratulations on your appointment to cabinet during the 43rd government of Canada.

While no party received a majority of seats in this last election, Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast overwhelmingly voted for parties that promised action on the climate crisis, pharmacare, electoral reform, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The Council of Canadians is a grassroots-based social action organization that exists to advocate for clean water, fair trade, climate justice, public health care, and a vibrant democracy. Our supporters have tasked us with holding the government accountable and pushing for change on issues that matter to them. We issue you this mandate letter on behalf of our supporters.

In this minority parliament, the government will need to listen to Canadians and work to implement our priorities.

The UN recognized the human right to water and sanitation in 2010, and yet, Indigenous Services Canada has listed 58 First Nations communities still under drinking water advisories. This number does not include short-term drinking water advisories, communities not funded by the departments, and communities that have had drinking water advisories lifted but still don't have safe drinking water.

Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper slashed legislative protections of 99 per cent of lakes and rivers. In the last term the Liberal government partially restored protections for waterways, but did not remove exemptions for major fossil fuel projects like pipelines.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank does not function as a public investment bank for infrastructure, but has become a privatization bank, aiming to involve private investors in 80 per cent of its projects.

Communities are standing up to protect their water from corporations and privatization through the Council of Canadians' Blue Communities Project and there is a growing movement to put water services back in public hands.

A recent investigative report has revealed dangerously high levels of lead in drinking water in municipalities across Canada, due to antiquated infrastructure and varied drinking water standards across provinces.

The federal government has a critical role to play. In your role as Environment Minister, you are representing this government's commitment to protecting water as a public trust and a human right. In order to reflect the wishes of Canadians, Ministers responsible for water must:

- Fully implement and reinforce the human right to water and sanitation and work to end all drinking water advisories, short and long term.
- Fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, their inherent right to water and commit to free, prior and informed consent with Indigenous peoples for all water projects.
- Work to provide clean, safe drinking water to First Nations by engaging and providing resources for local First Nations communities in developing solutions to their drinking water.
- Put in place a national drinking water standard across provinces and municipalities, and provide adequate public funding and support for municipalities to upgrade their water infrastructure.
- Provide low-cost, public funding for municipalities to finance, design, build and operate water and wastewater infrastructure and services through a public infrastructure fund, and put an end to the privatization of water and public-private partnerships. Work to support municipalities in bringing and keeping water and wastewater services in public hands.
- Fully restore the protection of every lake and river under the Canadian Navigable Waters Act, the Impact Assessment Act, and the Fisheries Act.
- Address major loopholes that hurt our water systems. Close the Schedule 2 loophole in the Fisheries Act that allows industries to turn lakes into tailing ponds. End the exemption for pipelines and powerlines and ensure all major projects undergo rigorous environmental assessments.
- Put an end to the loopholes in trade agreements that encourage bottled water exports and taking water for the purpose of bottling, and remove loopholes in trade agreements that encourage water exports.
- Declare ground and surface water a public trust, and guarantee community use over corporate water taking for profits.
- Focus on water with a new Ministry of Water that can oversee this crucial work.

In this minority government, Canadians make up the balance of power. The Council of Canadians is committed to protecting clean, accessible water. You have been entrusted with tremendous responsibility. We hope we can count on you to deliver this important mandate.

I await your response.