

December 14, 2021

To: The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
CC: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Natural Resources
The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services
The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

Congratulations on your appointment to cabinet during the 44th government of Canada.

The Council of Canadians brings people together through collective action and grassroots organizing to challenge corporate power and advocate for people, the planet and our democracy. In this minority parliament, our 150,000 supporters have tasked us with pushing for change on issues that matter to them. We issue you this mandate letter on their behalf.

Water resources in Canada have long been threatened by privatization and pollution. While impacted by climate change, the distinctive water crisis demands a wholistic approach to protecting sources by:

1. Protecting water as a public and human right including by preventing privatization of water and water management services.
2. Ensuring all projects impacting water undergo thorough and rigorous environmental assessments that include the cumulative impacts of pollution and extraction.
3. Respecting Indigenous sovereignty on their traditional territories as required by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples including intervening when provinces fail to do so.

As Minister your most important role as it relates to water is to ensure this essential and limited resource is available for generations to come. You can begin by declaring ground and surface water a public trust and guaranteeing community use over corporate water taking for profits. Fortunately, you have a number of tools at your disposal to ensure these principles are legislated and protected now and for the future.

You must provide low-cost, public funding for municipalities to upgrade, finance, build and operate water and wastewater infrastructure and services without requiring them to enter into P3s. Past governments have greatly reduced financial support for water infrastructure, forcing municipalities to enter into public-private partnerships (P3s) which are demonstrably more expensive and fail to deliver quality services.

You must ensure the Canada Water Agency is founded as an independent government agency, with a secure budget on par with its responsibilities, and that facilitates water governance in the public interest. The CWA can only fulfill its purpose if given significant powers, resources, and independence, ensuring it is free from the influences of powerful special interests and industries.



The CWA should oversee a multi-year funding of program grants that would support the creation of national networks of non-governmental organizations and universities working to protect water. The Federal government once played a key role in supporting these highly efficient networks but funding cuts and changes to the laws regarding the activities of charitable foundations have taken a heavy toll. It is time to restore Federal leadership in the funding of these networks.

The CWA should oversee a multi-year funding of grants to support communities in their attempts to protect local water sources. Decades of budget cuts and deregulation at all levels of government have forced communities to step into the void left by this long retreat from good governance. But communities do not have the resources or expertise required to effectively intervene against the power and influence of corporations in the various regulatory processes that still exist. Resources should also be made available to communities that wish to proactively study and document local water sources.

Finally, you must work with the Minister of Indigenous Services to continue addressing the water crises on First Nations reserves with substantive investments. You must immediately address the annual \$138 million budgetary shortfall recently reported by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Such crises must be addressed in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including free, prior, and informed consent of impacted Indigenous communities. Ensuring Indigenous communities enact and maintain sovereignty over resources on their traditional territories not only increases the likelihood of safe, health water sources for all of us, it also materially supports a context of reconciliation.

In addition to this important work, you should work within your government to:

- Put in place a national drinking water standard
- Fully restore the protection of every lake and river under the Canadian Navigable Waters Act, the Impact Assessment Act, and the Fisheries Act.
- Close the Schedule 2 loophole in the Fisheries Act that allows industry to turn lakes into tailing ponds.
- Ensure all major projects undergo rigorous federal environmental assessments and end the exemptions for pipelines and powerlines.
- Put an end to the loopholes in trade agreements that encourage bottled water exports and taking water for the purpose of bottling.
- Ensure that single use plastic beverage containers are phased out as quickly as possible.

This is the time to take bold action for water protection. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ravi Joshi
Co-Executive Directors, Council of Canadians – Le Conseil des Canadiens



Christina Warner

