

Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters Submission to the ENVI Committee

The climate crisis is a water crisis.

From coast to coast to coast, communities are on the front line of a relentless cycle of climate disasters. From droughts to fires to floods, climate change demands urgent attention, action and leadership to get ahead of these crises. According to the Canadian Climate Institute, these impacts cost Canada an average of \$14 billion annually in coastal and inland flood damage, further exacerbated by pollution, overuse, and habitat loss. By 2025, climate impacts and disasters, over 90% involving water, will slow down Canada's economic growth by \$25 billion annually, equivalent to 50% of projected GDP growth¹. The climate crisis also poses new, complex challenges most acutely seen through water events.

It's proven that investments in freshwater have tremendous benefits for people and the environment. A federal investment in water will deliver on priorities, including reconciliation, economic development, security and emergency preparedness, and climate adaptation.

To meet its freshwater commitments, the federal government must:

- [1. Establish an Effective and Independent Canada Water Agency,](#)
- [2. Modernize the Canada Water Act, and](#)
- [3. Properly Resource Freshwater across Canada.](#)

In the following submission, we outline these suggestions, the evidence before the ENVI committee via witness testimony, and the specific recommendations for each. Please note that following each piece of evidence, the number given in brackets, i.e. (81), pertains to the ENVI Freshwater meeting number.

All individuals quoted as evidence are members of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters and/or trusted advisors to the Coalition.

¹ Canadian Climate Institute, [Damage Control: Reducing the Costs of Climate Impacts in Canada](#), 2022

CCHW Recommendations for the Freshwater Committee

1. Establish an effective and independent Canada Water Agency

- **Implement** meaningful steps towards Reconciliation by fulfilling the Crown's commitment to government-to-government relationships with Indigenous peoples;
- **Establish** a clear federal water lead that provides the whole-of-government approach needed to implement programs and policies to face modern water challenges;
- **Collaborate** with Indigenous, provincial/territorial, and local governments to develop agreements for collaborative water governance across jurisdictional lines.
- **Advance** and represent Canadian leadership on water internationally.
- **Establish** Co-Governance Practices: Utilize UNDRIP principles to guide the implementation, administration and evaluation of the Canada Water Agency, ensuring that Indigenous and treaty water rights and roles are recognized and respected.
- **Create** an intergovernmental water table that includes Indigenous representatives and municipal, Provincial, territorial and federal governments that allows for meaningful action to be created while respecting different jurisdictions across watersheds.
- **Provide** funding and other resources to anticipate, investigate, avoid, and resolve water-related disputes between and within jurisdictions.
- **Prioritize** including, respecting and utilizing Indigenous Knowledge which provides valuable insights into water systems and their ecological balance.
- **Become** a Knowledge Liaison by facilitating collaboration between experts across transboundary waters, all levels of governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector.
- **Support** the establishment of open and accessible geospatial habitat inventories. This will enable knowledge and data sharing and support evidence-based decision-making.
- **Establish** Pan-Canadian standards for collection, evaluation and dissemination of good quality water data, knowledge and tools, including community-based water monitoring & management (CBWM).
- **Synchronize** ISED's clean tech-related programs for watershed protections to ensure broader support and funding for innovation and technology and build a sustainable and resilient economy.

2. Modernize the Canada Water Act.

- **Ensure** that the Act is consent-based and rooted in government-to-government relationships via a co-drafting process with Indigenous Nations, notably following guidelines via the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act in Canada.
- **Ensure** that the Act enshrines targets for conservation and restoration of freshwater in Canada, for example, by contributing to Canada achieving its international commitments to restoring and protecting 30 percent of freshwater by 2030.
- **Utilize** a cooperative approach to water management that respects the jurisdiction of provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and municipal governments.
- **Create** a Canada Water Act that accurately reflects the realities and science of climate change we are seeing today and anticipating for tomorrow.

3. Properly Resource Freshwater across Canada

In addition to adequately funding the Canada Water Agency and modernizing the Canada Water Act, and building on the \$650 Million investment in Freshwater from Budget 2023, we ask the Government of Canada to invest an additional **\$475 million over five years** in freshwater health, as well as **\$400 million over 10 years** in the BC Watershed Security Fund to reduce the impacts of climate-related disasters, improve health outcomes, protect nature and biodiversity, build and maintain resilient infrastructure, advance Truth and Reconciliation, and support a strong economy and workers. In addition, further investments in freshwater, innovation, science and nature-based solutions are needed to build a strong economy and healthy environment for present and future generations.

Further Invest in the Freshwater Action Plan:

- **\$280 million over five years** in additional funding for the Freshwater Action Plan to manage water quantity, improve water quality, and protect biodiversity. Funding should be prioritized for Western Canada priority watersheds, including: the Fraser River and the Mackenzie River; and the Canadian Columbia Basin, which is not currently designated as a priority watershed under the Freshwater Action Plan. Investments should be prioritized through a risk-based analysis using science, research & innovation, and in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders for targeted actions.
- **\$195 million over five years** to address the funding gap in the rest of the country for projects that address issues including climate mitigation, climate adaptation, Truth and Reconciliation through capacity building and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples, habitat restoration, water technology and innovation, community-based water monitoring, fish population recovery, planning, and natural infrastructure.

Invest in the BC Watershed Security Fund:

- **\$400 Million over 10 years** in the BC Watershed Security Fund to strengthen community resilience and reduce the impact of climate-related disasters, improve health outcomes, protect nature and biodiversity, build and maintain resilient infrastructure, advance truth and reconciliation and support a strong economy and workers.

Additionally, all of government must continue to support freshwater through investments in:

- **Nature-Based Solutions**, such as those wetlands provide, to address pressing water challenges across sectors and support biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation by mitigating flooding, droughts, and wildfires.
- **Geospatial data** to support evidence-based decision making and monitoring in watersheds across Canada.
- **Science, technology and Innovation** by aligning the Agency's science and data strategy on freshwater with ISED's tech-related programs and ensuring that ISED include funding water technologies in their cleantech programs and establishing a partnership between the National Research Council and the CWA to enhance collaboration in watertech R&D and industrial innovation;
- **Jobs and Training** in the watershed sector that support the maintenance, restoration, or improvement of healthy watersheds and address transition needs for employment that is dependent on single-resource industries. For example, BC's Watershed Sector provides more than 47,000 jobs and \$5 billion in GDP².

Background and Evidence for Recommendations

Establishing an Influential, Effective Canada Water Agency

Background

Creating an independent Canada Water Agency is the first step towards a modernized, collaborative and inclusive governing body for freshwater in Canada. The Canada Water Agency provides the unique opportunity to identify the vulnerabilities of communities by mitigating disasters, promoting adaptation, flood and drought recovery, pollution abatement and the use of natural infrastructure to restore river basin function and health. Currently, the Agency is nested within Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), within a transitional team that will work to establish the Agency independently from ECCC through legislation tabled on November 30, 2023. The standalone Agency will be housed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with hubs across Canada in Dartmouth, Montreal, the National Capital Region (NCR), Toronto and Vancouver. The Agency will report directly to the Minister of Environment.

² Delphi Group, [Working for Watersheds](#): Opportunities for Growth in BC's Water Sector, 2021

The Canada Water Agency provides an opportunity for the federal government to consolidate more than 20 federal departments and agencies that address freshwater into one cohesive body, a stated focus of the Agency, according to Daniel Wolfish, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Canada Water Agency (ENVI - 81). The coalition acknowledges and thanks the federal government for creating the Canada Water Agency as a standalone body, which will provide it with the legitimacy to ensure collaboration across government is essential to the meaningful success and action of the Agency, notably during its formative years.

While the specific mandate of the Agency is not public, we are aware that the five pillars of the Agency, as recognized by the ECCC, are [Policy Leadership](#), [Governance](#), [Indigenous Relationships](#), [Essential Data](#) and [Enabling Science](#). To better understand how these thematic areas were presented during the ENVI Freshwater study, we have broken them down and included direct quotes and discussions from the ENVI meetings.

Testimonies and Evidence Throughout the Freshwater Study:

Indigenous Relationships

- **Assembly of First Nations.** Pursue the creation of a national First Nations-led stewardship task force under the guidance and participation of relevant Chiefs Committees, to inform the implementation of the CWA and related legislation, policies, and initiatives; ensure sustainable, adequate, and long-term funding and human resources support for First Nations to undertake water protection and conservation initiatives; implement the government's Action Plan under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act; and rely on the AFN's National Climate Strategy as a framework for actions to ensure the protection of water. (Supplemental Brief, Nov. 2023)
- **Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.** Develop mechanisms and processes by which off-reserve Indigenous Peoples can be engaged and consulted on water rights and issues. As well as work together to develop dispute-resolution mechanisms and discuss pathways by which off-reserve Indigenous peoples can be meaningfully included in a coordinated and coherent policy and legislative approach to water governance throughout Canada. (Brief, Nov. 2023)
- **Dr. John Pomeroy,** Director of Global Futures Programme, stated, "Last week I spent the morning with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations in Saskatchewan. They continue to have profound and severe water problems, including with source water protection and water supply, and there are other issues for some communities. They also have a lot of ideas about solutions. I think more engagement with them would benefit everyone and would certainly help them find ways through the current crisis they have." (ENVI - 94)

- **Oliver Brandes**, Director, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria, stated, “[Advanced reconciliation] is fundamental. It is consistent with the TRC and UNDRIP . It is fundamental for impact and process—for example, employing a co-drafting process.” (ENVI - 96)
- **Zita Botelho**, Director of Watersheds BC “Investing in watershed security helps to advance the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Through the work of [the BC Healthy Watersheds Initiative], we have seen how this investment supported articles 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 36 and 39. The investment enables First Nations to focus on their priorities, and they have shown their leadership through this work.” (ENVI - 91)
- **Kat Hartwig**, Executive Director of Living Lakes Canada “Advance Indigenous Knowledge and Data sovereignty through water stewardship. Supporting Indigenous initiatives for water stewardship then de facto, land stewardship, provides us all the opportunity to learn how applied Reconciliation can help us to shift into new paradigms that provide action and care for many generations to come.” (ENVI - 97)
- **Andrew Stegemann**, Former Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters and National Director of Our Living Waters, “Meaningfully advance its commitment to reconciliation with indigenous peoples by developing pathways and providing resources for the co-governance of shared waters with indigenous nations, including recognizing and upholding inherent indigenous water rights and authority, and fulfilling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” (ENVI - 85)

Policy Leadership

- **Oliver Brandes**, Director, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria: “Water will define the century and the decades ahead. By that, I mean water and how we manage and govern it will decide whether we are a wealthy and prosperous nation or slump into mediocrity and missed opportunity.” (ENVI - 96)
- **Mathieu Launeville**: “Before the Agency was set up, there was chaos, and it was difficult for the members of our network to work with more than 17 departments and agencies on the subject of water. ” (ENVI - 96)
- **Caleb Behn**, Director of Rights - Assembly of First Nations (As an individual) “ Isn't that a future that Canada should aspire to? We would inspire the world. The reason is Canada has the sophisticated infrastructure [and] analytical capacities that other countries do not. We have the legal capacity. We're a multi-juridical jurisdiction. We already have UN declaration legislation in B.C. at the municipal level in Victoria and at the federal level. We are optimized to do something no one has ever done.” (ENVI - 93)

- **Alan Shapiro**, Strategic Advisor, BC Net Zero Innovation Network “There's absolutely a disconnect between our leadership on a world stage with the kinds of technologies that we're exporting, and our ability to actually tackle water issues at home.” (ENVI - 93)
- **Soula Chronopoulos**, President of Aqua Action (96)” We have no leadership in Canada for water. [...]Canada’s watertech sector must be treated as a core component of our freshwater protection strategy. Right now, it ‘s not. Due to a lack of focused and specific federal support for water technologies to address the water crisis, Canada’s water innovators are being lured south into more enticing jurisdictions, along with their start-ups, IP, and jobs[...]. We need leadership.” (ENVI - 96)

Governance

- **Oliver Brandes** Director, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria “Government can't make it rain, but [it can] help communities prepare for the trouble ahead and make sure everyone is doing their part.”(ENVI - 96)
- **Andrew Stegemann**, Former Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters and National Director of Our Living Waters: The federal government is the perfect jurisdiction to have a high-level overview and to bring together multiple jurisdictions as part of a federal government approach to water governance by creating the space and resources for governance tables that include all jurisdictions. (ENVI - 85)
- **Zita Botelho**, Director of Watersheds BC: You've heard from my fellow witnesses about the challenge of governance. There is an intersection of multiple jurisdictions—first nations jurisdictions here in British Columbia, local governments, the federal government and provincial government—coming together and needing to make decisions that are appropriate for particular places.” (ENVI - 91)

Essential Data

- **Dr. John Pomeroy**, Director of Global Futures Programme “ We need the leading-edge research and science capacity to inform wise water decisions and build state-of-the-art water prediction management systems to support our decision-making so we know in advance what's going to be happening.” (ENVI - 94)
- **Kat Hartwig**, Executive Director of Living Lakes Canada “That any coordinated water and climate monitoring networks being implemented in other river basins are built upon existing successful regional efforts. It is more cost effective and faster to replicate best practices of successful, and tested methodologies from one region to another.” (ENVI - 97)

- **Dr. Alain Pietroniro**, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Calgary, proposed one solution to Canada's lack of prediction systems to "enable research and operational groups across Canada to contribute the unique data, information, knowledge and predictive capabilities to support mitigating and adapting to water crises." (ENVI - 94)
- **Michelle Woodhouse**, Program Manager, Freshwater and Great Lakes Protections, Environmental Defence Canada, "To address the threat posed by algal blooms in Lake Erie and other freshwater bodies across the country, we are recommending that the federal government work with provinces to fund independent, certified agronomists and soil testing experts to reduce over-application of fertilizers on agricultural lands." (ENVI - 82)

Enabling Science

- **Roy Orb**, President of Saskatchewan Association of Rural municipalities, noted that "To achieve strong working relationships with the provinces, we recommend sharing data and knowledge; engaging with agencies, councils and organizations in each province on proposed changes to freshwater to consider impacts to all sectors of each province; leveraging the knowledge of local and regional networks involved in water management in each province" (ENVI - 93)

Dr Alain Pietroniro, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Calgary " We are running short on time to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. The devastating floods, droughts, algal blooms, wildfires and drinking water advisories that are acutely felt across Canada affect our personal safety, our way of life and the health of our ecosystems, and they're having a growing impact on our economy." (ENVI - 94)

- **Soula Chronopoulos**, President, AquaAction: "The Government must synchronize ISED's cleantech initiatives with the Canada Water Agency's (CWA) watershed protection efforts. Currently, the CWA lacks the necessary mandate and resources, which fall under ISED's remit through programs like IRAP, Clean Growth Hub, SDTC, and SIF. It's crucial to align the CWA's science and data strategy on freshwater with ISED's tech-related programs." (ENVI- 96)

Properly Resource the Freshwater across Canada

Background

Our watersheds contain nature's infrastructure. Investments in Canada's freshwater provides the essential benefits that underpin our economy, health and national well-being, by providing nature based solutions to support clean drinking water, thriving fisheries, food security, increased biodiversity and climate adaptation and resiliency solutions. The Canadian Climate Institute reports that every dollar spent on adaptation measures can save \$13 to \$15, considering both direct and indirect economy-wide benefits.

The 2023 Budget allocated \$650 Million dollars over ten years to support monitoring, assessment, and restoration work in the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg, Lake of the Woods, St. Lawrence River, Fraser River, Saint John River, Mackenzie River, and Lake Simcoe.

Evidence

- **Dr. John Pomeroy**, Director of Global Futures Programme: “ It's not just money; it's people's lives.” (ENVI - 94)
- **Zita Botelho**, Director of Watersheds BC: “There's a prime opportunity to create jobs and employment transitions. The Healthy Watersheds Initiative's major outcomes report shared that \$20 million in funding resulted in 1,273 direct jobs across B.C. - Investing in watershed security is a proactive step toward climate resilience, which not only safeguards our communities, but also saves money in the long run. (ENVI - 91)
- **Miki Eslake**, Program Coordinator of the Rivershed Society of British Columbia, observed “To effectively advance the freshwater agenda in Canada, the government must uphold its commitment to invest \$1 billion in the freshwater action plan. This investment must support watersheds like the Fraser and prioritize actions in collaboration with indigenous peoples.” (ENVI - 94)
- **Justine Nelson** Executive Director of the Rivershed Society of BC furthered: “Allocating funds after disasters happen to deal with the immediate aftermath is no longer sufficient; it's imperative to proactively address the root causes before our watersheds experience levels of drought and habitat loss they cannot recover from.” (ENVI - 94)
- **Dr. John Pomeroy**, Director of Global Futures Programme: “ Canada has an unprecedented number of water-related disasters. By my estimates, I'd say that they've exceeded \$40 billion in costs since the turn of the century. Even worse, I say that those water disasters have broken the trust that Canadians once had in their government to manage their water competently.” (ENVI - 94)
- **Coree Tull**, Co-Chair BC Watershed Security Coalition: “When we look at what's currently allocated under the freshwater action plan, of the \$650 million, we see that only \$420 million has been allocated. That leaves less than \$230 million for the rest of the country and those other priority river basins. It's just woefully inadequate as the amount that is needed to make meaningful and lasting changes to get ahead of the crises we're seeing.”(ENVI - 94)
- **Mathieu Laneuville**, President and Chief Executive Officer Réseau Environnement: “We have shown that for each dollar invested in water there is a return on investment of \$1.72, taking into account all benefits for human health.” (ENVI - 96)

- **Alan Shapiro**, Strategic Advisor, BC Net Zero Innovation Network: "This oceans-only blue economy definition sidelines fresh water, a massive omission given that the Great Lakes alone generate more than 1.5 million jobs and \$60 billion in annual wages across Canada and the U.S."(ENVI - 94) .

A Modernized Canada Water Act

Background

The Canada Water Act is our primary federal water legislation, yet it has not been meaningfully updated since it was passed in 1970. A comprehensive renewal of the Canada Water Act is one of the most important steps the government can take. The Act is Canada's primary federal freshwater legislation, yet it has not been modernized since it was passed in 1970 and has not been funded to effectively implement its provisions since the early 1990s.

Water security is a global challenge. Canada has an opportunity to be a leader in this space by safeguarding our own waters, working with our American neighbour to ensure effective transboundary management, and exporting our water expertise and innovations to other parts of the world. We cannot fulfill this role without a robust and modern legislative framework.

Evidence:

- **Andrew Stegemann**, Former Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters and National Director of Our Living Waters " The most important thing in front of the committee when it comes to recommendations for that is the renewal of the Canada Water Act. The Canada Water Act is 50 years old. It's really important that the act be aligned with, respect and uphold UNDRIP. With respect to water, that is the opportunity and that's why the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters is advocating that the act be co-drafted with indigenous nations. (ENVI - 85)
- **Caleb Behn**, Director of Rights - Assembly of First Nations (As an individual), "Section 5 of the federal UN declaration implementation legislation has a positive obligation on Canada to implement and align its laws and policies and regulations with the UN declaration, so that alone is a positive obligation that requires, in my view, proactive engagement. - It is my view that indigenous laws and legal order is because we have a very different relationality to the non-human because we view and interface with these non-human entities as having agency, as having breath, as having spirit, as having profundity." (ENVI - 93)