# **Preventing Oil Spills**

# **Letters to the Editors**

# **Guideline and Template**

Dear Nature Canada Members:

Letters to Editors are an excellent way to encourage and promote discussion of nature topics you are passionate about. A Letter to the Editor can help create awareness about an important issue and help to influence public opinion.

Publishing a Letter to the Editor is not a simple process. Most editors of publications receive up to 300- 500 letter submissions daily.

You can significantly improve your chances of having your letter published by following these guidelines.

**Letters to the Editor Guidelines**

* A timely letter will be more likely to be chosen for publication. It is best to respond within seven days to a particular article or news event that was published by the newspaper.
* Try to make the letter concrete if you are commenting on a national issue, highlight the national significance and try to link it to a recent event or article that discusses the issue.
* If you are responding to a community event or issue, your local (community) newspaper is the best publication to submit your letter to.
* Be concise, try to keep letters to fewer than 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.
* Send letters by e-mail and include the contents of the letter in the body of the e-mail message as plain text only. Do not use Microsoft Word format or rich text format (RTF).
* Do not send letters as an attachment.
* Ensure you include your name, address and daytime phone number.

***Preventing Oil Spills***

**Letter to the Editor**

**Template:**

*Insert the Name of Media Outlet or Publication*

*Attention: Editor*

*Address*

*City, Postal Code*

Dear Editor:

Re: [*State your reason for writing your letter right at the beginning*. *If you are responding to articles or editorials by the media, use the first sentence to reference the title or topic (such as declining monarch butterflies) of the article, name of the author or source (e.g., Globe and Mail), and the date it was published*. *Example response to articles or editorial introduction.]*

* In your [insert article title and date], columnist [insert name of reporter/columnist] states [insert main point of article].
* Recent news coverage of the tug boat Nathan E. Stewart sinking near Bella Bella, B.C, spilling more than 200,000 litres of diesel into water raises further serious questions about oil spill response limitations.

[*If you responding to a current issue, state that you are responding to the issue and where the issue is being addressed*. *Example issue introduction. State your points here. Include facts, references, or research here to establish credibility. Keep length in mind.]*

* When it comes to oil spill response and recovery planning, oil spill modeling scenarios are too few and too limited.
* The scenarios do not address the consequences oil spills can have on wildlife populations.
* In particular, the scenarios fail to consider the impact an oil spill can have on the numerous Important Bird Areas (IBA) that are intended to protect globally significant seabird colonies.
* The consequences are too high to have giant tankers transporting oil on a daily basis into the pristine waters of [insert local water example] for example, the Bay of Fundy, Hecate Strait or the Salish Sea.
* Our seas are ecologically priceless and biologically rich, renowned for their abundant birds, fish, whales, and other marine mammals.
* The Bay of Fundy alone has 14 Important Bird Areas annually hosting over a million shorebirds, with concentrations of Humpback, Fin and endangered North Atlantic Right whales.
* The Boundary Bay Important Bird Area just south of Vancouver and adjacent to the Trans Mountain oil tanker shipping lanes may be Canada’s most important Important Bird Area (IBA) on the west coast. This IBA has millions of birds visiting every spring and fall, hundreds of thousands of resident geese and ducks, and more wintering raptors than anywhere else in Canada.
* Oil spills in these waters would be catastrophic for our birds, whales, fisheries and tourism.

[*Include a call to action, asking readers to follow up with some activity, such as joining in calling on policymakers to address the issue.]*

* Canada urgently needs to ensure that we have the best evidence on the risks of a marine oil spill, and that having the best ways to prevent a spill and clean it up are priorities.
* The Exxon Valdez oil spill legacy is a sobering reminder call that oil spills happen and their affects are wide ranging on our wildlife. The Gulf of Mexico oil spill underscores this message.

[*End with a strong, positive statement in support of your case*]

* Our federal, provincial, territorial and indigenous governments need to work together to ensure the integrity of our marine ecosystems is sustained for our children and grandchildren—not to mention the birds and the whales.
* For Canada’s 150th birthday, let’s ask governments to protect Canada’s three oceans and its marine ecosystems and habitats along the shorelines.
* Please go to [Nature Canada’s website](http://naturecanada.ca/) to find out more about protecting nature and how you can help.

Sincerely,

Signature

Name of Writer

**BACKGROUNDER**

**Preventing Oil Tanker Spills and Protecting Nature in Canada’s Seas**

Energy East, Northern Gateway, TransMountain. None of these projects are just about pipelines carrying Alberta’s oil sands crude oil. They are about giant oil tankers carrying crude oil on a daily basis through, respectively, the Bay of Fundy, Hecate Strait and the Salish Sea.

All three of these seas are ecologically priceless and biologically rich, renowned for their abundant birds, fish, whales, and other marine mammals. The Bay of Fundy alone has 14 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) annually hosting more than a million shorebirds, with concentrations of Humpback, Fin and endangered North Atlantic Right whales.

Boundary Bay Important Bird Area just south of Vancouver adjacent to the TransMountain oil tanker shipping lane may be Canada’s most important IBA on the west coast with millions of birds visiting every spring and fall, hundreds of thousands of resident geese and ducks, and more wintering raptors than anywhere else in Canada.

What are the risks of a mishap involving one of these “oil sands” tankers? It would be catastrophic for birds, whales, fisheries and tourism in all of these waters.

What is the likelihood that the combined efforts of governments, industry and local communities could clean up the oil before it does its deadly (for wildlife), polluting work? Skepticism is justified given the evidence of the small April 2015 oil spill in Vancouver harbour and the gigantic 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Both spills occurred in benign weather, on calm seas, and close to oil spill emergency responders. Neither clean-up operation went well—to put it mildly.

What are the chances of a successful clean-up of a major oil spill in the Hecate Strait where storm seas can reach 26 metres in height? What about in the Salish Sea with its powerful winter storms, narrow channels and many navigation hazards? Or in the Bay of Fundy with its even worse weather and four to nine metre tides?

**Nature Canada’s Interventions in Pipeline Hearings**

Nature Canada intervened with experts and lawyers in the Northern Gateway and TransMountain hearings with BC Nature and the Environment Law Centre of University of Victoria. We are also intervening (again with experts and lawyers) in the upcoming Energy East hearings with Nature NB and East Coast Environmental Law.

Nature Canada’s job is to be a voice for nature at these hearings. Our mission is to ensure that the National Energy Board has heard the best evidence as to the risks of a marine oil spill and the best ways to prevent a spill and clean it up (assuming that possibility exists), as well as the significance of the impacts on nature in case there is a spill.

Working through the scientific and technical evidence at these hearings day after day is painstaking work that doesn’t necessarily attract television coverage or newspaper headlines.

Nature Canada is nonetheless convinced that our approach is critical to ensuring that the oil company proponents are held to account and that government decisions ensure that the integrity of these marine ecosystems is sustained for our children and grandchildren—not to mention the birds and the whales!

**National Ocean Protection Plan**

The $1.5 billion National Ocean Protection Plan announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on November 7, 2016 is a serious attempt to prevent and clean up marine oil spills along Canada’s Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic coasts.  The Plan promises:

* Increased marine safety information for mariners and improving hydrography, charting, and e-navigation products;
* Investments in oil spill cleanup research and methods;
* Funding for research on impacts of increased shipping on marine ecosystems and protection of marine mammals (such as the endangered Northern Right Whale);
* Investment in research to support oceanographic oil spill trajectory models;
* Adequate industry-funded compensation for those affected by oil spills through changes to the Canadian Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund; and
* Tougher requirements on industry to respond quickly to spills from ships.

This is good news for our marine ecosystems however, Nature Canada questions whether the federal plan--or even a bigger plan that spends many more billions of dollars--could ever hope to clean up a major spill from a tanker carrying Kinder-Morgan bitumen through the Salish Sea let alone a tanker carrying Energy East bitumen through the Bay of Fundy with its extreme tides and powerful currents.

We are not sure that more tugboats, booms and better spill-trajectory models would ever be adequate to clean up any major spill. That is why Nature Canada will be continuing our intervention in the National Energy Board’s Energy East hearings presenting independent scientific evidence and determining if the proposed clean-up methods and measures advanced by both TransCanada and the federal government are viable.