

PEOPLE'S MANDATE LETTER TO THE Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard

9 August 2023

Dear Minister Lebouthillier,

Congratulations on your newly appointed role, and thank you for agreeing to serve Canadians as our federal Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard. Public service is a high calling in any democracy, but your portfolio is an especially demanding one, encompassing the economic interests of coastal communities on three sides of the continent and the conservation imperatives of three oceans and the largest group of freshwater lakes on Earth, the Great Lakes.

For over 80 years, Nature Canada has acted as Canada's voice for nature. We speak on behalf of wildlife who depend on our lands, freshwater, and oceans to live and thrive. It is in that role that we address this mandate letter to you. We are calling on you to defend and restore nature and to fulfill the promise of a healthy ocean. We recognize that you will receive your official mandate from the Prime Minister and we thank you for this opportunity to share with you our hopes and concerns from nature's point of view.

Your leadership must exemplify vision, determination, and commitment to accountability in order to safeguard our oceans for the communities and wildlife that depend on them. As one of our Ministers, the people of Canada expect you to uphold the highest standards of integrity, both in your own conduct as a Minister and in the management of your department.

Your portfolio has implications across all levels of government. Accordingly, we expect you to work collaboratively with Indigenous, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments.

Similarly, we expect you to work respectfully with legislators from every political party. The mission of protecting our oceans can only be achieved by building consensus across partisan lines. We expect parliamentarians to work together to recognize that a healthy ocean that benefits all people is a vision that transcends partisanship.

We expect you to implement and respect the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), as part of a broader federal commitment to

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rebuilding relationships with Indigenous Canadians, recognizing and respecting unextinguished Indigenous sovereignty. In particular, we hope you will remember that any claims that Indigenous Canadians enjoy “Free, Prior, and Informed Consent” in Canada under the meaning of the UNDRIP will be empty and dishonest if they do not include a right to a decisive “no” when dealing with the government of Canada.

To realize these objectives, we ask that you achieve results for Canadians by delivering the following commitments.

- Work with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and with Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS), to ensure that Canada meets our commitment to protect and conserve at least 25 percent of waters by 2025, and at least 30 percent of waters by 2030. You should ensure that this work remains grounded in evidence-based science, Indigenous knowledge, and local accountability.
- Publish a detailed, site-specific framework for the pathway to protect at least 30 percent of waters by 2030, as well as metrics for the government of Canada to be held accountable for achieving this target. We have celebrated the work that was overseen by your predecessor to set Canada on the pathway to protecting 25% of our ocean by 2025 and we must continue this progress.
- Work with Indigenous partners to better integrate traditional knowledge and stewardship into planning and policy decisions generally, and more specifically, in the development and implementation of marine protected areas (MPAs).
- Ensure all new MPAs are genuinely protected, by prohibiting high impact, destructive, and extractive activities, such as oil and gas extraction, mining, dredging and dumping, and anchoring in highly sensitive areas.
- Ensure that new and existing MPAs adhere to the themes to be outlined in Canada’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), including: halting and reversing species extinction; reducing the impact of pollution on biodiversity; and restoring, maintaining, and enhancing nature’s contribution to humanity.
- Work with ENGOS, bona fide research institutions, businesses, local communities, Indigenous nations, and provincial and territorial governments, to develop a national strategy for sustainable, environmentally sound, economic development of fisheries, the ocean and freshwater economy, and the “blue”

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economy, for the benefit of coastal communities and Canadians at large. This must include the imperative to move the fishing sector towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, to restore lost protections, to rebuild fish populations in general and wild Atlantic salmon populations in particular, and to incorporate modern safeguards so fish and fish habitats are protected for future generations. It must also identify and eliminate harmful subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the livelihoods of coastal communities.

- Foster national reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and co-management of MPAs and by bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers to collectively advise you on fisheries management policies.
- Place Canada in a position of leadership – by example before word – to eliminate plastic pollution from the ocean, by: removing plastics from Canada's shorelines and waters; negotiating a meaningful Canadian contribution to support the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance; helping lead Canadian efforts to create a UN Plastic Pollution Treaty.
- Work with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to champion ratification by state parties of the agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction under the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* (also known as the "High Seas Treaty").
- Set and achieve independently-audited targets as part of the Ghost Gear Fund, for Canada to identify, remove, and responsibly dispose of lost or abandoned fishing gear from our waters, prioritizing those areas that provide habitat for species at risk.
- Strengthen Canada's call for a moratorium on international deep sea mining, until and unless sound and independent scientific research establishes a consensus around rules and regulations that could eliminate the risk of ecological destruction in the oceans.
- Strengthen protections for marine species at risk as a matter of urgency, by working with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, to propose changes to the *Species at Risk Act* process, to create enforceable timelines for Cabinet to render decisions on protecting maritime species identified by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.
- Link ocean and waters protection to broader efforts to combat climate change,

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in particular, by protecting and expanding coastal and ocean habitats with high capacities to absorb and sequester carbon and act as climate refuges for wildlife, such as seagrass meadows and tidal wetlands.

- Ensure that your decisions follow the best available, independent, peer-reviewed, evidence-based science. Create new funds for academic and professional research into marine biodiversity and the threats posed by climate change, overfishing, and pollution. Provide matching funds for Canadian projects that qualify for Commonwealth Blue Charter funding.
- Promote ocean literacy and public awareness about the importance of our oceans, linked to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

The conservation community is passionate about protecting and restoring our oceans with thousands of people across Canada working hard every day to ensure a healthy blue planet. While not exhaustive, we hope that this list can be a starting point toward that goal.

We recognize that your portfolio is a difficult one, especially as it combines responsibilities for both promoting and regulating the Canadian fisheries sector. We strongly urge you to prioritize conservation over short-term exploitation of oceans resources, as a way of squaring that circle: only a genuinely sustainable oceans policy can guarantee that Canada's fisheries will support future generations of families and communities, while meeting our country's environmental commitments.

We congratulate you again on your appointment as Minister of Fisheries, Ocean, and the Canadian Coast Guard. Nature Canada, the community of ENGOs, and the people of Canada at large want you to succeed and need you to succeed; we stand ready to help you do so.

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Prepared by Nature Canada on behalf of nature-lovers across Canada.

Nature Canada is Canada's voice for nature. For 80 years, Nature Canada has helped protect over 110 million acres of parks and wildlife areas in Canada and countless species. Today, Nature Canada represents a network of over 175,000 members and supporters and more than 1,200 nature organizations.

