



A Strong, Independent Canada Water Agency

On August 30, 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, alongside Minister Steven Guilbeault, affirmed his commitment to freshwater in Canada through the establishment of the Canada Water Agency (CWA) in 2022. This commitment built on two years of engagement on the role, mandate and priorities of the CWA led by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). This thorough engagement demonstrated the need for a **strong, independent agency**. ECCC's 2021 [stakeholder and public engagement report](#) states,

“We heard from participants that a CWA should promote a holistic, collaborative and integrated approach to freshwater management, characterized by a whole-of-government approach at the federal level, and by effective collaboration and engagement with provinces and territories, Indigenous governments and rights-holders, water users, stakeholders and the public.”

The call for a strong, independent national water agency is actively supported across the water community by leading water scientists, policy experts, NGOs, and the Canadian public.

The creation of an independent Canada Water Agency is the most effective way to fulfill the Prime Minister's commitment to Canadians and demonstrate strong federal leadership on fresh water at home and abroad. The establishment of the Canadian Water Agency will provide a legacy of water protection for generations to come.

What Would a Strong Canada Water Agency Provide Canadians?

- A clear consistent mandate for fresh water protection across Canada with a defined goal and measurable outcomes.
- An all-of-government approach that centralizes and integrates federal water knowledge, investments and services.
- Direct accountability to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change akin to other independent government agencies, such as Parks Canada.
- The responsibility, resources and expertise to advance collaboration with provinces, territories, Indigenous governments, and stakeholders such as the water community and industry.
- Dedicated funding and resources for investment in communities across Canada. strategically aligning resources to keep Canada's fresh water safe and secure.

How Would a Strong-Canada Water Agency Support Canadian Communities ?

Ensure Climate Change Responsiveness and Resilience

- The impacts of climate change are being seen on waters across the country: floods, droughts, wildfires, and deteriorating water quality. These impacts have huge financial costs and expose vulnerabilities in our forecasting, planning, and communication systems, as demonstrated by last year's catastrophic floods in BC.

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- The CWA can help build resilience to climate change across the country. This requires a **high degree of responsiveness** to rapidly deploy and strategically align resources through collaboration and partnerships with other levels of government.
 - The CWA has a key role in ensuring that Canada has the data and knowledge to predict and respond to climate change. An agency would **coordinate and support long-term freshwater research and climate initiatives** with academic, nongovernmental, and private sector partners.
 - The CWA will have the **credibility to convene and engage** across sectors to strategically align resources in a structured and sustainable way.

Lead a Government-wide Approach to Fresh Water

- By taking a whole-of-government approach, the CWA would reduce complexity and siloes by **integrating freshwater research, policy, and programs** (currently spread across 20 departments of the federal government), with a critical priority on flood plain mapping and flood and drought forecasting.
- By providing the CWA with the appropriate **mandate, independence and authority** from the highest levels of government, the CWA will set and meet meaningful goals and outcomes that require pulling together from across departmental lines.

Collaborate with Other Governments

- The Prime Minister commitment to strengthening the Freshwater Action Plan in major water basins across the country calls for **collaboration with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments** to develop agreements and processes for collaborative governance of water across jurisdictional lines.
- The CWA needs a sufficiently **elevated position within government** (a separate CEO/Deputy Minister reporting directly to the Minister of ECCC) to give it the credibility to engage in government-to-government discussions.

Advance Canadian Leadership Internationally

- Water security is a key foreign policy issue as the impacts of climate change are felt around the world. Canada, as a major freshwater nation, has an opportunity to establish itself as a **world leader on water science and management**.
- Advancing the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and promoting Canadian water innovation abroad requires a strong, independent agency with the **legitimacy to represent Canada on the international stage**.
- Canada has numerous transboundary waters shared with the United States, which is currently developing a global water security strategy. An agency demonstrates Canada's **commitment to keeping pace with the US to protect our shared waters**.



Retain Public Trust and Confidence

- Canadians value fresh water and are concerned about the future accessibility of clean and safe water, as consistently shown in [public opinion polling](#). ECCC's 2021 discussion paper concludes that “**Canadians nationwide clearly care deeply about protecting freshwater**, the resilience of Canada's freshwater systems, and the sustainable use of freshwater resources.”
- After years of enthusiastic consultation, Canadians across the water community and beyond are expecting an agency that shows that the government is **fulfilling its commitment to protecting fresh water in a climate-impacted future**. Creating a new branch of ECCC does not fulfill this commitment.

The Strength of an Independent Agency

Establishing a strong, independent agency is critical to achieve the goals outlined above and fulfill the Prime Minister's commitment to Canadians. For this commitment to effectively respond to and meet the needs of Canadians now and in the future most effectively it must be an independent agency that reports to the Minister of ECCC. Elevating the importance of our freshwater in Canada provides:

- **National Visibility.** An independent agency signals to all Canadians that our fresh water is important and its protection is enshrined and accountable for results to the highest levels of the federal government.
- **National Issue.** An independent agency signals to other governments that the federal government is committed to addressing water as a national issue, and to ensure that linkages to other national issues can be addressed.
- **National Leadership.** An independent agency demonstrates the federal understanding that water security requires the ability to directly and independently collaborate with other governments.
- **Collaboration and Inclusiveness.** An independent agency ensures the necessary priority, authority, capacity and mechanisms exist to conduct the required integration with key water functions situated in other federal departments.
- **Organizational Functionality.** An independent agency can employ streamlined and direct approval mechanisms and a flexible and nimble financial framework for ~~more~~ effective collaboration (*e.g.*, special operating agency). An independent agency will have increased operating flexibility.

The Prime Minister has mandated the creation of an agency. Alignment of water efforts through an independent agency is the structure that will deliver this mandate.

This is an effort in nation-building; it moves us from the shadow of the status quo.

The government's commitment to establishing the CWA is a recognition that Canada has the vision to securely and collaboratively manage fresh water across the country to ensure that we are prepared to address increasingly complicated challenges.