



August 10, 2026

Environmental Justice and Racism Team
Environment and Climate Change Canada
125 Zaida Eddy Private
Ottawa, ON, K1R 0E3

Email: EJ-JE@ec.gc.ca

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Canada's draft National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice 2026-2031

The undersigned organizations and individuals jointly submit these comments in response to the [call for public comments](#) on the [draft National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice 2026-2031](#) posted on June 26, 2026.

Our organizations advocated for passage of the [National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act](#) ("the Act"), which requires the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature to develop a strategy to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and to advance environmental justice ("the Strategy") within two years of the Act entering into force and table the Strategy in Parliament within the next 15 days on which the House sits. The Act sets out the criteria for the Strategy and requires the Minister to report to Parliament on its implementation after five years.

In December 2025, several of our organizations submitted recommendations for the development of the Strategy, outlining key principles, approaches, actions, and likely outcomes that could ground a credible strategy.

Environmental racism and injustice are real and systemic issues across Canada. Environmental racism and injustice can happen wherever people live, work and play. Racialized and Indigenous communities are frequently on the front lines of climate change and environmental degradation and are more exposed to pollution than predominantly white communities. People in racialized and Indigenous communities can also face higher risks of exposure to environmental harms due to factors including their gender, sexual orientation, income, geographic location including rural and remote areas, immigration status and disability.

We recognize that the draft Strategy represents an important step in the federal government's recognition of these inequities, but it requires significant changes before the final Strategy is released in the fall and enters implementation. We continue to advocate for the creation of a final Strategy that capitalizes on this opportunity to make meaningful efforts to address environmental racism and injustice. To be seen as a credible document consistent with the intent and requirements of the Act, the Strategy must:

- More clearly articulate the results of the examination of the link between race, socio-economic status and environmental risk, then present and maintain the data in an accessible format; and
- Clearly identify specific actions, accountability mechanisms, and indicators of success in relation to each priority area, supported by adequate resources for implementation.

Building on our previous submission (attached), in this submission, we share high-level feedback on the Strategy as a whole, as well as specific recommendations under the priority areas identified in the draft Strategy that would advance its objectives.

Table of Contents

High-Level Recommendations for the Strategy.....	6
Priority area one: Promoting environmental justice across federal government institutions.....	8
Priority area two: Strengthening collaboration and coordination on assessing, preventing and addressing environmental racism for a stronger Canada.....	14
Priority area three: enhancing impacted communities' participation in federal environmental policy and decision-making.....	16
Priority area four: Learning from experience and avoiding recurring challenges.....	18
Conclusion.....	22

Recommendations by Priority Area

Priority area one: Promoting environmental justice across federal government institutions		Page
1A.	Commit to review and amend federal laws and regulations for consistency with environmental justice principles. This commitment should set out priority legislation that should be reviewed and reported on within the first three years of implementation (e.g., the <i>Fisheries Act</i>, the <i>Impact Assessment Act</i>, etc.), and set out timelines for other laws that require updates to ensure that they are not continuing to exacerbate environmental injustice. The Action Plan should set out priority laws and regulations requiring updates (e.g., the <i>Fisheries Act</i>, <i>CEPA</i>, the <i>Environmental Enforcement Act</i> and its regulations, regulations under the <i>Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act</i>) with review and reporting to ECCC within three years, and identify timelines for review and reporting on other laws and regulations that require updates to ensure that they are not continuing to exacerbate environmental injustice.	9
1B.	Commit to ensure that federal decision-making aligns with environmental justice principles through: • Updating the SEEA Directive and GBA Plus to explicitly require environmental equity considerations; • Establishing a standardized environmental justice screening process for ECCC and other federal decisions that requires consideration of cumulative, historical and cross-border impacts, existing environmental burden, meaningful community participation, Indigenous rights, and other measures to avoid or mitigate disproportionate impacts; • Requiring that federal decision-making on nation-building infrastructure and major projects meet the minimum standards of coherence with the Strategy; and • Explicitly incorporating environmental justice as a mandatory decision factor in federal environmental assessments, permitting and approval legislation.	10
1C.	Rather than assign a “community of practice”, commit to the creation of a dedicated Office of Environmental Justice accountable for the implementation of the Strategy and reporting to parliament, including: • Reviewing and recommending updates to federal laws and regulations to integrate environmental justice; • Coordinating departmental plans to implement the Strategy; • Housing an ombudsperson responsible for advocating on the advancement of environmental justice in the federal government; and • Hosting an advisory committee for continued engagement on the implementation of the Strategy.	11
1D.	Require federal departments to develop and release publicly available Environmental Justice Implementation Plans that identify department-specific: • Priority areas for advancing environmental justice and addressing environmental racism; • Actions to implement the Strategy and integrate environmental justice into the	12

	- departmental mandate; - Timelines for departmental action; - Measurable indicators of departmental success; and - Annual reporting commitments.	
1E.	Commit to stronger enforcement of federal environmental laws through an environmental justice lens, focussing on underserved communities who often face disproportionate impacts of environmental violations, and directing funds from the Environmental Damages Fund to support research, enforcement, restoration, and prevention in impacted communities.	<u>13</u>
Priority area two: Strengthening collaboration and coordination on assessing, preventing and addressing environmental racism for a stronger Canada		
2A.	Commit to accessibility and transparency around data on environmental racism and environmental injustices through: - Creating an accessible methodology that allows for qualitative indicators that account for the cumulative, historical, intergenerational, and health effects of environmental risk; - Investing in data collection by both the government and communities, supported by guidance and funding; - Releasing consolidated datasets and background documents used in the Study and informing the Strategy; - Developing and releasing an interactive map that allows the public to access and contribute pollution data and other socio-economic data in a layered format similar to EJScreen; and - Ensuring that the Study, its underlying database, and mapping tools developed from it are updated, maintained by the government, and made publicly accessible.	<u>14</u>
Priority area three: enhancing impacted communities' participation in federal environmental policy and decision-making		
3A.	Commit to meaningful public engagement and Indigenous consultation as the basis of all federal environmental decisions, not only in policy and program development, but also in project approvals and regulatory decision-making. This requires that the government not only reject proposals to deregulate project-level decision-making, including the virtual elimination of public engagement or abbreviation of Indigenous consultation, but also commit to improving access to capacity funding that can allow communities to have a meaningful say in the projects that may impact them.	<u>17</u>
3B.	Commit to transparent engagement around the development and implementation of the Strategy by: - Publishing a summary of engagement activities undertaken during Strategy development, including participating organizations, major themes raised, and how feedback informed the final Strategy; - Creating an advisory committee that involves participation from impacted communities on assessing and preventing environmental racism and advancing environmental justice; and - Conducting ongoing engagement with impacted communities on the	<u>17</u>

	implementation of the Strategy including updates to and maintenance of federal mapping of environmental justice.	
Priority area four: Learning from experience and avoiding recurring challenges		
4A.	Recognize and support Indigenous governance, stewardship, and environmental authority as foundational elements of environmental justice by: • Recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, governance systems, stewardship practices, knowledge systems, and ethical and moral frameworks as essential to environmental decision-making, rather than solely as information to be incorporated into existing regulatory processes; • Ensuring that federal environmental laws, policies, and decision-making processes recognize Indigenous sovereignty, leadership and authority in the stewardship and management of lands, waters, and ecosystems; • Developing mechanisms in full collaboration with Indigenous communities to support Indigenous-led environmental governance, including sustained funding for Indigenous environmental monitoring, technical capacity, and the exercise of Indigenous governance responsibilities; • Supporting Indigenous data sovereignty by ensuring that Indigenous communities have the resources and authority to collect, govern, interpret, and maintain control over environmental data relating to their territories; • Ensuring that federal environmental decision-making processes are grounded in meaningful engagement and informed consent, with adequate capacity funding to enable Indigenous communities to participate as decision-makers rather than solely as participants; and • Addressing jurisdictional gaps and accountability challenges that create barriers to Indigenous environmental governance and leave communities navigating fragmented federal and provincial responsibilities.	<u>19</u>
4B.	Commit to addressing legacy and historical environmental injustices and compensating impacted communities through reform of the Environmental Damages Fund to direct the proceeds of enforcement to benefit affected communities through monetary redress, restoration, or building capacity for environmental protection and to participate in environmental decision-making.	<u>21</u>
4c.	Commit to funding the implementation of the Strategy per the recommendations of the Green Budget Coalition for Budget 2026.	<u>21</u>

High-Level Recommendations for the Strategy

We continue to advocate for a well-scoped Strategy based on principles that guide meaningful change, and one that sets out actions, binding commitments, accountability measures, and indicators of success. We urge that the implementation of this Strategy be well-resourced so that in five years, the report required under section 5 of the *Act* can show that the Strategy has moved the needle on environmental racism and environmental justice in a meaningful way.

Scope of the Strategy

While the draft Strategy marks an important step in the recognition of environmental racism and environmental justice at the federal level, we continue to advocate for an expansive approach that engages with the federal power to act on environmental injustices and environmental racism beyond traditionally conceived environmental hazards or polluting industries, one that considers cumulative impacts, pollution whether historic, current, or projected, and the impacts of climate change and other ongoing burdens.¹ The final Strategy must recognize and consider cumulative effects, cross-border impacts, climate change, and legacy or ongoing environmental injustices given the scope of the issues that it seeks to address.

Environmental injustice frequently arises where responsibility is fragmented across jurisdictions. Recognizing the focus of this Strategy on the federal role in advancing environmental justice and addressing environmental racism, particularly the role of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), we advocate for the Strategy to be framed in the context of the need for collaboration and scoped for immediate action.

Indigenous and other impacted communities should not bear the consequences of uncertainty regarding whether certain departments or levels of government are responsible for addressing environmental harms. We advocate for an approach to environmental justice in the Strategy that ensures collaboration to address environmental racism, which cuts across departmental mandates on issues related to health, food, housing, and the built environment. The Strategy must also recognize the public health dimension of environmental justice: environmental injustices manifest in inequities in life expectancy, in mental health impacts, in climate impacts, and in exposure to disease and toxic substances. As noted below, inequities in health outcomes can serve as indicators of environmental racism and other forms of environmental injustice, and vice versa. These point to the need for environmental justice to break down silos and be embedded throughout federal decision-making processes, policies, and laws across departments. The Strategy should identify the specific departments that will collaborate on addressing environmental racism and advancing environmental justice, the steps they will need

¹ We acknowledge that the protection of the environment is a shared area of responsibility between the federal and provincial/territorial governments; an actionable, credible strategy at the federal level can empower other levels of government in their own work to advance environmental justice and address environmental racism and support the federal government's own work under the Strategy.

to take, how they will involve communities in these activities, and what coordination will look like to bring departments together in activities that will address environmental racism.

In the immediate term, environmental justice must be fully embraced as core to the mandate of ECCC, which is best-equipped to play a leadership role in assessing, preventing, and addressing environmental racism within federal jurisdiction, but also inspiring and enabling communities, decision-makers, and other levels of government in their efforts to do the same.

Advancing environmental justice requires more than mere acknowledgement, it requires action to address current impacts and prevent further environmental injustices. A credible final Strategy will be scoped accordingly, taking particular care given current federal priorities that increasingly emphasize accelerating approvals, major projects and streamlining assessments. As noted in the draft Strategy, advancing environmental justice requires providing opportunities for meaningful participation, improving federal decision-making, and removing barriers to inclusion. It is imperative that the Strategy serve as part of a minimum standard for all federal decision-making, including “nation-building” infrastructure and major resource projects. Ultimately, the Strategy will not succeed in advancing environmental justice in Canada without policy coherence - including with respect to consequential federal decisions about major infrastructure, energy and resource development, which the draft strategy does not mention. Meaningful participation by communities should be central. This must include clear action steps for how communities will participate, how community-based approaches to participation and decision-making will be defined, and steps that will be taken to address systemic and other barriers that prevent communities from participating in decision-making.

Guiding Principles

We appreciate that the draft Strategy recognizes the four principles of environmental justice: procedural, recognition, distributive, and restorative justice. However, the definition of restorative justice as employed in the draft Strategy fails to include the compensatory nature of restorative environmental justice as recognized in section 3(3)(b)(iii) of the Act, nor does it acknowledge the issues of ongoing and cumulative effects from environmental harms.

In addition, we continue to advocate for the incorporation of the precautionary principle and the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice, as well as alignment with the guiding principles of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (CEPA)* including intergenerational equity and non-regression. In the absence of short-term indicators of the advancement of environmental justice given the often-times generational impacts of environmental harms, these principles provide a credible foundation for environmental justice to be meaningfully advanced.

Actionability, Outcomes, and Resources

Rather than simply encourage or support, consider or identify opportunities, a credible Strategy will include binding commitments that compel the federal government to enact the structural change needed to prevent and address environmental injustice. Before the development of an

action plan, the final Strategy itself must identify actions like those outlined below that can enable progress on its objectives. Beyond the Strategy itself, we urge the development and release of an action plan for implementation within the first year of the Strategy's five-year term.

Every implementation commitment contained within the final Strategy should clearly identify the responsible department, the actions to be undertaken, implementation timelines, expected outcomes, measurable indicators of success, and public reporting commitments. Without clearly assigned responsibility, it will be difficult to assess implementation or evaluate progress in the five-year report required under the Act.

The implementation of the Strategy should be able to demonstrate measurable changes regarding environmental justice and environmental racism. However, the draft Strategy as it stands has not outlined ways to operationalize the Strategy, let alone how actions could translate into outcomes. These outcomes should include, for example, reductions in pollution sources or environmental hazards, measurable health improvements, and the number or proportion of laws or regulations made consistent with environmental justice principles.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the final Strategy must be well-resourced. Without making explicit commitments to provide resources that would enable the implementation of the Strategy, the Strategy risks being only symbolic while communities continue to face the risks and harms of environmental injustice.

Priority area one: Promoting environmental justice across federal government institutions

A Strategy that is effective at assessing, preventing and addressing environmental racism and at advancing environmental justice, will require a whole-of-government approach spanning across federal government laws and institutions. Advancement of environmental justice requires transformative change that centres environmental justice in the federal government's roles regulating and making decisions concerning the environment and human health.

We continue to advocate for commitments to review and amend federal laws and regulations to prevent environmental racism and environmental injustice, the integration of environmental justice as a core value in other forms of federal policy and decision-making, and the creation of a high-level Office of Environmental Justice that can steward the implementation of the Strategy with clear deliverables and accountability to ensure that meaningful improvements are achieved after five years. These efforts must be systematic, and be both well-resourced and reflected in efforts on the ground to enforce Canada's federal environmental laws.

1A: Commit to Review and Align Federal Laws

We continue to recommend that the Strategy include clear commitments to a fulsome review of existing federal laws and regulations that will identify amendments necessary to prevent environmental racism and environmental injustice. A similar process was undertaken pursuant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. It will be important to facilitate the inclusion of knowledge from affected communities in this review.

In particular, many federal laws lay out decision-making authorities and opportunities where environmental justice considerations could be taken into account; directing review and reform to identify these opportunities and integrate environmental justice as a core component of decision-making frameworks will ensure that the federal government is not fighting against itself as it works to implement this Strategy. After five years of the Strategy, the government should be able to identify how many pieces of federal regulation and legislation have incorporated environmental justice into decision-making as one metric of success in implementation. There is a need to be more explicit in outlining how communities will be involved and how community perspectives will be accommodated so the process doesn't remain "business as usual".

We draw your attention to long-standing recommendations of the Canadian Environmental Law Association and Ecojustice, supported by our organizations, to amend the Environmental Protection Act provisions of *CEPA* to expand their scope and remove barriers, as well as the recommendations of the Green Budget Coalition to update the fine regime under the *Environmental Enforcement Act*.

Recommendation 1A. Commit to review and amend federal laws and regulations for consistency with environmental justice principles. This commitment should set out priority legislation that should be reviewed and reported on within the first three years of implementation (e.g., the *Fisheries Act*, the *Impact Assessment Act*, etc.), and set out timelines for other laws that require updates to ensure that they are not continuing to exacerbate environmental injustice.

The Action Plan should set out priority laws and regulations requiring updates (e.g., the *Fisheries Act*, *CEPA*, the *Environmental Enforcement Act* and its regulations, regulations under the *Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act*) with review and reporting to ECCC within three years, and identify timelines for review and reporting on other laws and regulations that require updates to ensure that they are not continuing to exacerbate environmental injustice.

1B: Update, Apply and Access Tools for Consideration of Environmental Equity in Government Decision-Making

The draft Strategy identifies the potential consideration of environmental justice in Gender-based Analysis Plus (“GBA Plus”) and the identification of potential opportunities to reflect environmental justice as a priority in federal policies, frameworks, or strategies as potential priority actions for implementation. The updating of GBA Plus is a worthwhile effort to integrate an environmental justice lens into federal government decision-making, but we recommend that this be bolstered by updating and systematically applying the Cabinet Directive on Strategic Environmental and Economic Assessment (“SEEA Directive”) to require analysis and consideration of effects on environmental equity in government decisionmaking, with explicit recognition of cumulative effects. The absence of an environmental justice lens in the SEEA Directive — apart from impacts to Indigenous Peoples, their lands and traditional territories — is a critical oversight. Explicitly integrating equity considerations in the SEEA Directive would build on the Government of Canada’s GBA Plus approach, and reinforce it in the context of understanding who is impacted by climate change, biodiversity loss and other environmental effects of key government decisions. It is particularly important that these equity considerations explicitly include ongoing impacts, cumulative effects, legacy impacts, and cross-border effects, as these signals of vulnerability to environmental injustice have often been left unaddressed and unconsidered. Assessing how environmental justice is reflected in policy, program, or strategy design and implementation, and in other forms of federal government decision-making will be key in measuring the success of the Strategy.

Beyond updating GBA Plus and the Cabinet Directive on Strategic Environmental and Economic Assessment, the Strategy should establish a standardized environmental justice screening process for significant federal decisions, including environmental assessments, permitting decisions, regulatory approvals, major funding decisions and significant policy initiatives. Such screening should require consideration of cumulative, historical and cross-border impacts, existing environmental burdens, meaningful community participation, Indigenous rights, and measures to avoid or mitigate disproportionate impacts. In light of current federal government priorities to accelerate project approvals, it is imperative that environmental justice principles and environmental justice assessments are fully applied and not waived under major project legislation; implementation of the Strategy must serve as part of the minimum standard for all federal decision-making, including nation-building infrastructure and major resource projects.

The final Strategy should commit to integrating environmental justice as an explicit decision-making factor for ECCC and under other federal environmental legislation governing environmental assessments, permitting, regulatory approvals and project authorizations. There is substantial evidence from the United States showing that permitting decisions substantially change environmental justice outcomes for impacted communities. The success of the Strategy will ultimately be measured by whether environmental justice meaningfully influences federal decisions affecting communities, rather than existing solely as a policy aspiration.

At the minimum, and as an interim measure, ECCC must integrate environmental justice considerations into its regulatory and programmatic proposals. As the department responsible for the Strategy, ECCC is uniquely positioned to take leadership on implementation in a manner that can inspire action to advance environmental justice and address environmental racism.

Recommendation 1B. Commit to ensure that federal decision-making aligns with environmental justice principles through:

- Updating the SEEA Directive and GBA Plus to explicitly require environmental equity considerations;
- Establishing a standardized environmental justice screening process for ECCC and other federal decisions that requires consideration of cumulative, historical and cross-border impacts, existing environmental burden, meaningful community participation, Indigenous rights, and other measures to avoid or mitigate disproportionate impacts;
- Requiring that federal decision-making on nation-building infrastructure and major projects meet the minimum standards of coherence with the Strategy; and
- Explicitly incorporating environmental justice as a mandatory decision factor in federal environmental assessments, permitting and approval legislation.

1C: Establish a High-Level Office of Environmental Justice to Steward Implementation of the Strategy

The [Green Budget Coalition](#) has long recommended establishment of a high-level Office of Environmental Justice to elevate the profile of this mandate as a Government of Canada priority. We continue to echo this recommendation of the Green Budget Coalition in this submission.

As noted by the Green Budget Coalition, an Office of Environmental Justice “would provide a single point of contact and provide leadership to accelerate federal action on environmental justice, and bring together people and processes to achieve results.” The establishment of an Office of Environmental Justice to oversee implementation of the Strategy and reporting to parliament would foster the collaboration raised as a potential priority in the draft Strategy and ensure accountability as the body clearly identified as responsible for leading the advancement of environmental justice in the federal government. This Office of Environmental Justice could also house bodies called for in our previous submissions to improve accountability and effective implementation of the Strategy, such as an ombudsperson responsible for advocating on the advancement of environmental justice in the federal government, and an advisory committee for continued engagement as the Strategy progresses.

Recommendation 1C. Rather than assign a “community of practice”, commit to the creation of a dedicated Office of Environmental Justice accountable for the implementation of the Strategy and reporting to parliament, including:

- Reviewing and recommending updates to federal laws and regulations to integrate environmental justice;
- Coordinating departmental plans to implement the Strategy;
- Housing an ombudsperson responsible for advocating on the advancement of environmental

- justice in the federal government; and
- Hosting an advisory committee for continued engagement on the implementation of the Strategy.

1D: Require Departmental Environmental Justice Implementation Plans

To support a whole-of-government approach, the Strategy should require federal departments with environmental decision-making responsibilities to prepare publicly available Environmental Justice Implementation Plans. These plans should identify department-specific priorities, implementation actions, timelines, measurable indicators of success, and annual reporting commitments, and could be integrated into existing departmental commitments such as Federal Sustainable Development Strategies. Our recommendation of the Office of Environmental Justice could serve as the single contact point within ECCC to lead overall coordination, implementation, reporting, environmental justice data development, mapping, enforcement, and administration of related funding mechanisms. Other departments and agencies should be responsible for integrating environmental justice into their mandates. These should include:

- Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada for addressing environmental health risks, cumulative health impacts, health inequities, and health surveillance;
- Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for Indigenous rights, consultation, community capacity, Indigenous-led data governance, and addressing environmental injustices affecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities;
- Natural Resources Canada, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada, and Infrastructure Canada for ensuring environmental justice is embedded in resource development, major project, infrastructure investment, and regulatory decision-making;
- Statistics Canada for supporting standardized environmental justice indicators, demographic analysis, and addressing data gaps;
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and the Privy Council Office for embedding environmental justice into federal accountability frameworks, Cabinet decision-making processes, strategic assessments, and departmental performance reporting; and
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Canadian Heritage for addressing environmental justice considerations related to agriculture, socioeconomic vulnerability, barriers to participation, and cultural impacts.

Departmental implementation plans would provide a practical mechanism for translating the Strategy into operational decision-making across government.

Recommendation 1D. Require federal departments to develop and release publicly available Environmental Justice Implementation Plans that identify department-specific:

- Priority areas for advancing environmental justice and addressing environmental racism;
- Actions to implement the Strategy and integrate environmental justice into the departmental mandate;

- Timelines for departmental action;
- Measurable indicators of departmental success; and
- Annual reporting commitments.

1E: Ensure that Environmental Enforcement Includes an Environmental Justice Lens

Uneven enforcement of environmental protection laws contributes to environmental racism and environmental injustice. Holding polluters accountable for violations that disproportionately impact Indigenous, racialized and low-income communities is an environmental justice priority. However, these communities face multiple barriers in accessing justice. The Strategy should support a focus on investigations, compliance activities and enforcement action in relation to violations with environmental justice impacts, as well as outreach to communities facing environmental justice concerns. We recommend that ECCC direct funds from enforcement actions to underserved and impacted communities through the Environmental Damages Fund, supporting research, enforcement, restoration, and prevention that can result in tangible environmental justice outcomes. Committing resources to support enforcement in overburdened communities can address real and ongoing instances of environmental racism and environmental injustice, and can provide important data to inform further government decision-making to advance environmental justice. Supporting interventions from multiple federal departments is necessary to empower communities that experience multiple intersecting systemic inequalities to address environmental racism.

As mentioned above, legislative amendments to make the “citizen enforcement” provisions of *CEPA* more accessible and responsive could empower communities to directly address violations of *CEPA* requirements through Environmental Protection Actions.

The Strategy should also seek to address how the federal government responds to reporting of incidents on environmental injustice. Avenues for communities to contact the federal government regarding environmental injustices should be explored given the magnitude and breadth of environmental justice issues. For example, the empowerment of an ombudsperson to advocate for environmental justice within federal ministries, which could be housed under the Office of Environmental Justice as noted above.

Recommendation 1E. Commit to stronger enforcement of federal environmental laws through an environmental justice lens, focussing on underserved communities who often face disproportionate impacts of environmental violations, and directing funds from the Environmental Damages Fund to support research, enforcement, restoration, and prevention in impacted communities.

Priority area two: Strengthening collaboration and coordination on assessing, preventing and addressing environmental racism for a stronger Canada

Recognizing the complexity and systemic nature of environmental justice is an important first step in working towards the transformative change required to advance it. Strengthening collaboration is a worthwhile goal and can be supplemented by immediate action from the federal government to implement the Strategy and lead by example.

One of the key areas in which the draft Strategy could be strengthened in this regard is the collection and accessibility of data. As required under section 3(3)(a) of the Act, the draft Strategy includes a preliminary study of the links between race, socio-economic status and environmental risk (the “Study”). A credible Strategy will build on this work to ensure that data can be used to inform sound decision-making to advance environmental justice and address environmental racism.

2A: Commit to Accessibility in Data Collection Methodology and the Creation of a Publicly Accessible Mapping Tool

The draft Strategy proposes to develop and share a transparent and standardized methodology to assess environmental burden and social vulnerability nationally; this is a worthwhile goal that could strengthen mapping and data accessibility, in turn informing efforts to address environmental injustices. However, this methodology must allow for qualitative data, such as experiences of communities through interviews, focus groups and consultations. The draft Strategy as it stands privileges quantitative indicators, but many communities experience disproportionate environmental harms that are cumulative, historical, intergenerational, cultural, or psychosocial - in other words, harms that are not always measurable through monitoring stations or quantitative methods. The final Strategy should direct the development and dissemination of a standardized methodology that allows for qualitative indicators and accounts for cumulative, historical, and intergenerational effects, as these can be critical in determining where environmental injustices occur and informing the measures to address them.

A standardized methodology must also be supported by resourcing that can allow the government and communities to use it. This includes guidance and funding that can allow communities facing barriers to employ the methodology and support for the resulting data to be incorporated into an accessible national data platform. Supporting the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in this way can help capture important data in line with the federal government’s existing commitments to ecological mapping and harnessing data to strengthen decision-making as set out in Pillar 2 of [*A Force of Nature: Canada’s Strategy to Protect Nature*](#) (the “Nature Strategy”). Broad-scale ecological mapping will not only inform

decision-making consistent with the goals of the Strategy to advance environmental justice in general, but could also have tangible impacts by the end of the five-year term of the Strategy, measured based on the availability of data and reductions in environmental risk/burden.

Once data is collected using this standardized methodology, it must be made publicly available through an accessible tool that can actually help decision-makers take environmental justice considerations into account. Publicly accessible, geospatial information can help decision-makers take environmental justice considerations into account—not only government, but also private actors and communities. Access to the locations of data and analysis methodology alone is not sufficient as many communities suffering environmental injustices face barriers and lack the resources to perform analysis themselves.

A searchable tool with layers of data that ease barriers to analysis, similar to “[EJScreen](#)” developed and formerly hosted by the US EPA, would allow government and communities to identify environmental risks and consider environmental justice in decision-making, while also revealing areas of data deficiency that could signal potential environmental injustices and warrant research and action. The federal government is uniquely positioned to host and maintain this tool, which would be populated with data collected in line with the federal government’s existing mandates through Health Canada and the census, as well as its commitments under the Nature Strategy. The ability to add localized data layers would lower barriers to access for impacted communities whose data may not be reflected in federal datasets, and allow the tool to amplify action at the community level. If implemented, this platform would inform implementation of the Strategy and the advancement of environmental justice, enabling other decision-makers to act and avoiding pressure on the federal government for action outside its purview, while providing transparent and measurable indicators of success that could be reflected after five years.

At a minimum, as an interim measure, we urge the consolidation and publication of the dataset and background documents underlying the Study with the final Strategy, so that it is possible for impacted communities to replicate the study and use it to inform decision-making.

Recommendation 2A. Commit to accessibility and transparency around data on environmental racism and environmental injustices through:

- Creating an accessible methodology that allows for qualitative indicators that account for the cumulative, historical, intergenerational, and health effects of environmental risk;
- Investing in data collection by both the government and communities, supported by guidance and funding;
- Releasing consolidated datasets and background documents used in the Study and informing the Strategy;
- Developing and releasing an interactive map that allows the public to access and contribute pollution data and other socio-economic data in a layered format similar to EJScreen; and
- Ensuring that the Study, its underlying database, and mapping tools developed from it are updated, maintained by the government, and made publicly accessible.

Priority area three: enhancing impacted communities' participation in federal environmental policy and decision-making

Centring impacted communities with ongoing and meaningful engagement and consultation will be a key component of a credible Strategy. Translating the principles of this priority area of the draft Strategy into reality requires meaningful engagement and consultation as the basis for decisions not only at the policy and program level, but at the project level as well. This means defining a community-based approach to participation and decision-making by communities to ensure that this approach is premised on their cultural orientations, cultural practices, and ways of knowing. The government must be willing to accommodate new and/or different approaches to engagement with communities that are meaningful and authentic to the communities. It must recognize that without meaningful consent and ensuring that projects are conducted in an environmentally just manner from the start, project approvals pose serious risk to proponents, health, and the environment. This requires investment in the conditions that make self-determination and healthy, meaningful consent possible long before projects reach regulatory decisions. The government must also recognize the need for transparency, ongoing conversations, reflecting input in outcomes, and understanding the impacts of decision-making. These are important ways of building trust in the engagement process and can result in better outcomes that are consistent with principles of environmental justice.

We support potential priority actions identified in this area including the development of a federal framework on inclusive engagement in environmental policy, and of guidance on addressing common barriers experienced by communities in engagement and consultation. Lessons should be learned from the engagement process in the development of the Strategy; the framework and guidance must themselves be developed in deep consultation with impacted communities and centre their experiences, particularly of the barriers and challenges posed by existing federal engagement processes. For these efforts to be effective, the Strategy must direct that material support be provided given that these communities already know that the barriers they face often take the form of limited financial means and capacity.

Beyond these, we advocate for this Strategy to serve as a tool to centre environmental justice in decision-making in the face of proposals for reckless deregulation that would eliminate opportunities for public participation and undermine trust in environmental decision-making. The final Strategy must ensure that meaningful engagement is maintained, improved and resourced in federal decision-making, and include ongoing engagement on the Strategy after its release this fall. It is important that these efforts are transparent, clearly identified and well-resourced to ensure meaningful improvements to community participation in decision-making.

3A: Improve Meaningful Engagement in Federal Decision-Making at All Levels

The draft Strategy comes amidst a federal political climate that has placed increasing emphasis on accelerating approvals, major projects and streamlining assessments. This approach comes at the expense of careful and deliberate consideration of short and long term environmental and health impacts associated with such proposals. These federal priorities exacerbate the need for safeguards to ensure that decisions are consistent with principles of environmental justice. As such, we recommend that the Strategy include commitments to safeguard and improve opportunities for meaningful engagement in federal decision-making. Beyond investigating coordinated environmental approaches to engage with impacted groups the Strategy must include binding commitments to ensure that meaningful engagement throughout the process is not undermined by accelerated project approvals. We recommend the rejection of the deregulation agenda proposed in the [Major Projects Discussion Paper](#) released in May that would effectively eliminate meaningful public engagement in nearly all federal decisions around major projects. This is particularly important not only in view of the environmental objectives of the Strategy, but also in view of the major projects agenda of the federal government; limits on community involvement in decision-making or influence over outcomes are against the national interest and undermine national unity. If governments believe environmental justice requires understanding and addressing the impacts experienced by Indigenous communities today, then those same concerns must meaningfully inform decisions about future expansion. Environmental justice cannot simply mean studying harm after it occurs while simultaneously creating the conditions for even greater impacts tomorrow.

Recommendation 3A. Commit to meaningful public engagement and Indigenous consultation as the basis of all federal environmental decisions, not only in policy and program development, but also in project approvals and regulatory decision-making. This requires that the government not only reject proposals to deregulate project-level decision-making, including the virtual elimination of public engagement or abbreviation of Indigenous consultation, but also commit to improving access to capacity funding that can allow communities to have a meaningful say in the projects that may impact them.

3B: Ensure Transparency and Ongoing Engagement on the Strategy

Meaningful improvements to the participation of impacted communities in environmental decision-making must include the Strategy itself. We recommend the inclusion of mechanisms to support ongoing engagement with the public and impacted communities, through, for example, an advisory committee on assessing and preventing environmental racism and advancing environmental justice. Beyond this, deliberate, well-resourced engagement that meets communities where they are must continue after the release of the Strategy this fall to ensure that impacted communities are guiding the:

- Implementation of the Strategy;

- Indicators being used to evaluate results;
- Assessment of data tools for usability;
- Addressing of data gaps useful for communities;
- Reports to Parliament; and
- Ongoing work to apply an equity lens to government laws, policies and programs.

Engagement must be meaningful and centre impacted communities, which requires resources and a commitment to accountability. Ongoing engagement with impacted communities provides opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategy and mitigates the potential for the implementation of the Strategy to further environmental injustices.

In the interim, the federal government should also publish a summary of engagement activities undertaken during Strategy development, including participating organizations, major themes raised, and how feedback informed the final Strategy. This would strengthen transparency and public confidence in implementation.

Recommendation 3B. Ensure transparent engagement around the development and implementation of the Strategy by:

- Publishing a summary of engagement activities undertaken during Strategy development, including participating organizations, major themes raised, and how feedback informed the final Strategy;
- Creating an advisory committee that involves participation from impacted communities on assessing and preventing environmental racism and advancing environmental justice; and
- Conducting ongoing engagement with impacted communities on the implementation of the Strategy including updates to and maintenance of federal mapping of environmental justice.

Priority area four: Learning from experience and avoiding recurring challenges

The draft Strategy does not give adequate attention to the real and ongoing ways in which environmental racism and injustice are perpetuated, nor does it identify federal actions or decisions that can ensure that the government does learn from experience and avoid recurring challenges. If the government is serious in this endeavour, the Strategy must enable the federal government to address historical and ongoing environmental injustices, provide compensation for environmental harms, and ensure that project and policy decisions avoid the perpetuation of environmental injustices going forward. Learning from experience requires consideration of the real challenges that Indigenous peoples have faced in securing recognition of their governance, stewardship, and decision-making authority with respect to the environment. It also requires the recognition of the federal government's responsibility to take actions to address, remedy, and compensate for environmental harms, and its obligation to allocate resources that can support the effective implementation of this Strategy.

4A: Recognizing Indigenous Governance, Stewardship, and Environmental Authority

Recognizing and supporting Indigenous governance, stewardship, and authority in relation to the environment is an important step in environmental justice. These efforts do not replace or fulfill the government's pre-existing obligations to uphold Indigenous and treaty rights, and processes involved, but are essential to support processes of fulsome and early engagement, proper consultation, free, prior, and informed consent, and others, that can result in better environmental justice outcomes for impacted Indigenous communities.

A credible National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice must recognize that current environmental strategies have often failed to recognize Indigenous sovereignty or meaningfully incorporate Indigenous stewardship, governance systems, and the moral and ethical frameworks that guide Indigenous relationships with lands and waters. Indigenous Peoples already possess the knowledge, practices, and responsibilities necessary to steward their territories. Indigenous governance systems should not be treated simply as sources of knowledge to be incorporated into existing environmental decision-making processes; rather, they should be recognized and supported as existing systems of governance, responsibility, and authority. Advancing environmental justice requires revisiting responsibility for environmental protection through an Indigenous lens, with greater recognition of Indigenous sovereignty including through its expressions in land and environmental management. The final Strategy should ensure that Indigenous approaches to environmental governance, including Indigenous ethical and moral approaches to relationships with the natural world, are meaningfully reflected in federal environmental laws, policies, and decision-making processes.

Recognizing Indigenous environmental authority also requires addressing the structural barriers that limit many communities' ability to exercise their stewardship responsibilities. Environmental governance in Canada is characterized by significant jurisdictional complexity, including unclear responsibilities between federal and provincial governments, which can leave communities navigating fragmented regulatory systems while experiencing ongoing environmental harms. These jurisdictional gaps should not leave Indigenous communities responsible for resolving uncertainty between governments or carrying the burden of inadequate coordination and accountability. The final Strategy should identify pathways to clarify responsibilities, strengthen accountability, and address regulatory gaps that weaken environmental protection.

Building Indigenous capacity is essential to advancing environmental justice. Many Indigenous communities currently lack capacity or financial resources required to monitor environmental contamination, measure contaminants, maintain ownership and control of environmental data, and employ qualified personnel to conduct environmental monitoring. These capacity gaps can prevent communities from fully understanding and responding to environmental harms affecting their lands and waters. The final Strategy should include sustained and long-term investment in Indigenous-led environmental monitoring, support for traditional governance structures, recognition of Indigenous data sovereignty, and resources that enable communities to collect,

interpret, and govern environmental information according to their own priorities and governance systems.

Meaningful environmental justice requires moving beyond consultation processes that position Indigenous Peoples only as participants in decisions made by others. Indigenous communities must have the capacity and authority to exercise their sovereignty and participate as decision-makers in matters affecting their lands, waters, and communities. This requires engagement grounded in informed consent, meaningful Indigenous leadership in environmental decision-making, and adequate resources to ensure that communities can effectively participate in regulatory processes. Strengthening Indigenous governance capacity is not only a matter of improving participation; it is necessary to recognize and support Indigenous responsibilities and rights to steward their territories.

Finally, environmental justice must be understood through an intergenerational lens. Environmental degradation has consequences that extend across generations, and addressing these harms requires educating younger generations about the moral and ethical implications of environmental decisions and fostering long-term responsibility for protecting lands, waters, and future generations. The final Strategy should promote the precautionary principle, intergenerational responsibility, and approaches to environmental governance that recognize the obligations owed to both present and future generations.

Recommendation 4A. Recognize and support Indigenous governance, stewardship, and environmental authority as foundational elements of environmental justice by:

- Recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, governance systems, stewardship practices, knowledge systems, and ethical and moral frameworks as essential to environmental decision-making, rather than solely as information to be incorporated into existing regulatory processes;
- Ensuring that federal environmental laws, policies, and decision-making processes recognize Indigenous sovereignty, leadership and authority in the stewardship and management of lands, waters, and ecosystems;
- Developing mechanisms in full collaboration with Indigenous communities to support Indigenous-led environmental governance, including sustained funding for Indigenous environmental monitoring, technical capacity, and the exercise of Indigenous sovereignty;
- Supporting Indigenous data sovereignty by ensuring that Indigenous communities have the resources and authority to collect, govern, interpret, and maintain control over environmental data relating to their territories;
- Ensuring that federal environmental decision-making processes are grounded in meaningful engagement and informed consent, with adequate capacity funding to enable Indigenous communities to participate as decision-makers rather than solely as participants; and
- Addressing jurisdictional gaps and accountability challenges that create barriers to Indigenous environmental governance and leave communities navigating fragmented federal and provincial responsibilities.

4B: Commit to Addressing and Compensating Communities for Legacy and Historical Environmental Injustices

The draft Strategy recognizes in its definition of environmental justice the principle of restorative justice, but fails to reflect this in the priority areas or actions it identifies. Restorative justice cannot simply be recognitional or participatory; it must be compensatory as well. We recommend that the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF) be updated so that fines collected for environmental harms benefit affected communities through monetary redress, restoration, or building capacity for environmental protection and to participate in environmental decision-making. This would be one way of ensuring that impacted communities benefit from enforcement action, see some level of compensation for environmental harms, and are included in creating solutions to environmental injustices. Applying the “polluter pays” principle and directing compensation to impacted communities can enable the ongoing improvement of environmental outcomes, reflected not only in the presence or absence of pollutants, but in health, cultural, and social outcomes, particularly in Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 4B. Commit to addressing legacy and historical environmental injustices and compensating impacted communities through reform of the Environmental Damages Fund to direct the proceeds of enforcement to benefit affected communities through monetary redress, restoration, or building capacity for environmental protection and to participate in environmental decision-making.

4C: Commit to Well-Resourced Implementation

Securing sufficient resourcing to implement government initiatives and translate commitments into outcomes is a recurring challenge that should be avoided in the final Strategy. Investing in the implementation of the Strategy is not only a moral imperative, but an investment in building better for the future, reducing future costs by mitigating harm to human health, healthcare systems, and the environment, as well as mitigating long-term legal, corporate, and environmental risks and their associated costs. As noted above, existing resources like the EDF should be reformed to support impacted communities in line with the Strategy. Beyond this, we continue to lift up the recommendations of the Green Budget Coalition for funding in Budget 2026 to implement the Strategy, including support for research, community engagement, and enforcement.

Recommendation 4C. Commit to funding the implementation of the Strategy per the recommendations of the Green Budget Coalition for Budget 2026.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering our submissions in the development of the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice. While limited in scope given the brief nature of the engagement period on the draft Strategy, these submissions identify both high-level changes and specific recommendations that our organizations believe would strengthen this Strategy and transform the draft into a credible document capable of achieving its objectives. We urge the federal government to implement these recommendations and not miss the opportunity to set the tone of how environmental justice is integrated into the federal government's mandate. Only with clearly identified actions, commitments, accountability mechanisms, and indicators of success, as well as the resources to support implementation, will the Strategy enable meaningful change for communities impacted by environmental racism and advance environmental justice.

Sincerely,

Russell Chiong
Staff Lawyer
West Coast Environmental Law Association
rchiong@wcel.org

Lisa Gue
National Policy Manager
David Suzuki Foundation
lgue@davidsuzuki.org

Sean O'Shea
Government Relations Specialist
Ecojustice
soshea@ecojustice.ca

Dakota Norris
Indigenous Caucus Manager
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment
dakota@cape.ca

Heather M. Fast, B.A., J.D., LL.M.
Policy Advocacy Director
Manitoba Eco-Network
policy@mbeconetwork.org

Erica Phipps
Executive Director
Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment
erica@healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

Fe de Leon
Senior Researcher and Paralegal
Canadian Environmental Law Association
deleonf@cela.ca

Ingrid Waldron
Professor, HOPE Chair in Peace and Health
McMaster University
waldroni@mcmaster.ca

Cassie Barker
Senior Program Manager
Environmental Defence
cbarker@environmentaldefence.ca

Naoual Laaroussi
Communications and Partnerships Coordinator
Breast Cancer Action Quebec
naoual.laaroussi@acsqc.ca

Beatrice Olivastri
Executive Director
Friends of the Earth Canada
beatrice@foecanada.org

Meg Sears
Chairperson
Prevent Cancer Now
info@preventcancernow.ca

Appendix:
December 2025 Joint Submission



environmental
defence



Canadian
Environmental Law
Association
EQUITY. JUSTICE. HEALTH.



CAPE
Canadian Association
of Physicians
for the Environment

Association Canadienne
des Médecins
pour l'Environnement
ACME

December 12, 2025

Environmental Justice and Racism Team
Environment and Climate Change Canada
125 Zaida Eddy Private
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 0E3

Sent by e-mail to: ej-je@ec.gc.ca

Dear Officials:

Re: Considerations for development of the national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice

The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice, Environmental Defence and West Coast Environmental Law Association jointly submit these comments in response to the engagement documents posted September 29, 2025, on the [Advancing Environmental Justice](#) website.

Our organizations advocated for passage of the *National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act* (Bill C-226), and joined the Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice in [celebrating its royal assent](#) in June 2024. The Act requires the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature to develop a strategy to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and to advance environmental justice (referred to in this submission as “the strategy”) within two years of the day on which the Act enters into force. It sets out criteria for the strategy and requires the Minister to report to Parliament on its implementation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide early input on the development of Canada’s first environmental justice strategy. We look forward to reviewing and providing feedback on the draft strategy in the consultation phase as well. Our organizations endorse the “Joint statement on the development of a national strategy respecting environmental racism and environmental justice” (attached). This supplementary submission provides further detail with respect to the following matters:

Environmental justice is a transformational strategy in Canada’s national interest	2
Scope of the Strategy.....	4
Guiding principles	5
Data collection and mapping	5
Deliver on existing mandates to advance environmental justice	6
Review and align federal laws.....	7
Remove barriers that prevent impacted communities from accessing government programs	7
Measures to support a whole-of-government approach	8
ECCC’s environmental enforcement program	8
Resource considerations	9
Ongoing engagement	9

Environmental justice is a transformational strategy in Canada’s national interest

Environmental racism and injustice are real and systemic issues across Canada. Environmental racism and injustice can happen wherever people live, work and play. A 2020 report by the UN special rapporteur on toxic wastes and human rights pointed to “a pattern in Canada where disadvantaged and under resourced groups, and Indigenous peoples in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada.”¹ Racialized and Indigenous communities are frequently on the front lines of climate change and environmental degradation and are more exposed to pollution than predominantly white communities. People in racialized and Indigenous communities can also face higher risks of exposure to environmental harms due to factors including their gender, sexual

¹ Visit to Canada. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes. November 27, 2020. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/45/12/Add.1>

orientation, income, geographic location including rural and remote areas, immigration status and disability.

An equity lens on federal environmental policy and decision-making has too often been absent. However, there have been important positive developments in recent years, including:

- Canada's support for UN Resolution [A/Res/73/300](#) in 2022, recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable development;
- Amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* passed in 2023, recognizing the right to a healthy environment and explicitly mandating consideration of effects on "vulnerable populations" in risk assessments;
- Incorporation of "equity, climate and environmental justice" as guiding principles in the 2023 National Adaptation Strategy;
- In 2019, the introduction of Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) which requires the consideration of the "intersection of sex and gender with other identity factors" in impact assessment and energy project reviews under the *Impact Assessment Act* and *Canadian Energy Regulator Act*;
- And in 2024, the passage of Bill C-226 *The National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act*.

The implementation of these new mandates is nascent (at best) and risks being undermined if environmental equity considerations are not prioritized in government decision-making, or simply as a result of inadequate resources. Therefore it is critical that the national strategy not only document the extent of environmental racism and environmental injustice in Canada, but also affirm Canada's commitment to advancing environmental justice and identify mechanisms to ensure this goal is prioritized across government. The strategy can help clarify and address capacity gaps faced by communities, Indigenous nations and governments.

The strategy is particularly important given the federal government's intention to expedite approvals of major projects on timelines that could make it difficult if not impossible to fully understand how projects will affect groups, and the prospect of increasing fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure. In Canada and globally, the links between fossil fuels and environmental injustice are well-documented. Indigenous and racialized communities are disproportionately harmed by climate change (of which fossil fuel combustion is a leading cause) and in particular upstream oil and gas pollution. Moreover, the *Building Canada Act* (Bill C-5) and the Canada-Alberta Memorandum of Understanding set the stage for

exempting major projects from federal environmental laws and regulations with no explicit requirements to prevent discriminatory outcomes.

In a context where long-term, comprehensive, cumulative impacts are difficult to assess and regulate across jurisdictional boundaries, an environmental justice strategy can support evidence-based approaches to guide federal action. If adequately resourced and implemented well, it can support transparent and accessible decision-making for communities facing environmental threats and injustices, strengthen coordination across jurisdictions and reduce long-term legal and environmental risks by supporting well-informed policy planning rather than reactive responses to harms.

Scope of the Strategy

We agree with the description of environmental racism set out in the introduction to the “Foundation 2” engagement document: “Environmental racism occurs when environmental decision-making, policies, and practices disproportionately harm certain communities based on race.” This strategy must seek to empower communities impacted by environmental racism and injustice and guide decision-makers to ensure impacted communities are full participants in decisions made in or about their territories or neighbourhoods.

The preamble to the *National Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Strategy Act* recognizes that “the establishing of environmentally hazardous sites, including landfills and polluting industries, in areas inhabited primarily by members of those communities could be considered a form of racial discrimination.” The strategy must include, but not be limited to, measures to assess, prevent and address environmental racism associated with environmentally hazardous sites. Polluting industries and landfills are just two of the countless and complex ways that racialized and Indigenous communities are further disadvantaged and under resourced by environmental injustice. A credible strategy must be more comprehensive and address laws, decision-making, policies and practices that are not limited to those that apply to landfills and polluting industries.²

The [Belem Declaration on Fighting Environmental Racism](#), launched at the COP30 climate summit, recognizes “that historic and ongoing patterns of discrimination, unequal access to domestic and global decision-making, and legacies of colonialism contribute to

² We recognize that the federal government and provinces/territories share jurisdiction for environmental protection.

differential exposure to pollution, climate hazards and nature loss, and to unequal access to technology and services.” Canada should endorse the Belem Declaration and align the strategy with its call to action.

Guiding principles

We recommend that the strategy set out guiding principles to inform implementation. Guiding principles will also help position the strategy to adapt and evolve over time to address new developments. We direct your attention to the following principles, for consideration:

- The precautionary principle, according to which early intervention to prevent potentially serious or irreversible harm is warranted even in the absence of full scientific certainty.
- The 17 [Principles of Environmental Justice](#).

In addition, the federal government needs to work with Indigenous peoples to develop principles for the strategy respecting environmental justice and Indigenous communities. These principles should center Indigenous laws and legal principles and in the process also consider principles embedded in related Government of Canada policy or legislation, such as the 10 [principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples](#), and the [First Nations' OCAP principles](#) (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession). These principles provide clear standards for how information is collected, governed, shared and applied, and they ensure that environmental decisions align with Indigenous rights, jurisdiction and community wellbeing. They will help centre Indigenous legal orders and ways of being and knowing as foundational decision-making frameworks rather than supplementary perspectives in the strategy's implementation.

Likewise, the strategy should connect with the [Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 guiding principles](#), including the other principles added in 2023 in relation to the right to a healthy environment (intergenerational equity and non-regression).

Data collection and mapping

Population exposure data in Canada is not typically disaggregated by race or income level, and Canadian environmental indicators rarely incorporate an equity lens. Addressing this data gap will be essential to identify priorities, and also to track progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. Section 3(3)(a) of the *National Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Strategy Act* (the “Act”) requires the minister to undertake a study, that includes:

- (i) an examination of the link between race, socio-economic status and environmental risk, and
- (ii) information and statistics relating to the location of environmental hazards;

As well, s. 3(3)(b)(iv) of the Act proposes that the strategy may include “the collection of information and statistics relating to health outcomes in communities located in proximity to environmental hazards.”

As a starting point, we recommend updating the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators, Statistics Canada’s Census of Environment, the environment domain indicators in Canada’s Quality of Life Framework and other related metrics to incorporate an equity lens. Publicly accessible, geospatial information can help decision-makers take environmental justice considerations into account—not only government, but also private actors and communities. The mapping tool “[EJScreen](#)” developed and formerly hosted by the U.S. EPA offers a model on which to build.

Lack of data – “data deserts” – must be seen as a signal of potential environmental injustice and a reason to engage with communities, not as a barrier to action. Qualitative approaches, including deep listening in communities, must be prioritized in the absence of quantitative data.

Deliver on existing mandates to advance environmental justice

As a place to start, ECCC must work to integrate an equity lens in all departmental policies, programs and initiatives. The strategy must also direct a high level of ambition for implementation of existing mandates that support environmental justice. This means, for example, adopting a holistic review of Crown projects with a focus on assessing cumulative effects and impacts on communities, taking other activities and projects affecting the community into account.

The federal government has many tools to address environmental racism, which include but are not limited to ECCC minister’s responsibilities for implementation and enforcement of:

- Chemical substances management
- Pollution and waste management
- Environmental Damages Fund
- National Pollutant Release Inventory
- Contaminated sites

- The right to a healthy environment and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* as a whole
- *Fisheries Act*
- *The Impact Assessment Act*
- *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*

There is also a need to identify gaps and address them in these areas of work.

Review and align federal laws

We recommend that the strategy direct a review of existing federal laws to identify amendments necessary to prevent environmental racism and environmental injustice. A similar process was undertaken pursuant to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. It will be important to facilitate the inclusion of knowledge from affected communities in this review.

We draw your attention to long-standing recommendations of the Canadian Environmental Law Association and Ecojustice, supported by our organizations, to amend the *Environmental Protection Act* provisions of CEPA to expand their scope and remove barriers.

As well, amendments to the “equivalency” provisions of CEPA proposed in Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025, should be refined to ensure that the protection of the right to a healthy environment and the duty to uphold the principle of environmental justice under CEPA are taken into account when assessing equivalency of provisions in force under provincial or territorial laws. Similarly, regulations made under the *Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act* must ensure that federal standards that prevent environmental racism and advance environmental justice are maintained.³

Remove barriers that prevent impacted communities from accessing government programs

The impacts of environmental racism can be compounded by a lack of capacity at the community level to navigate solutions. Complex bureaucratic processes and lengthy

³ More broadly, we are in strong agreement with the government’s proposal to exclude requirements that work to prevent risks to the health, safety or security of Canadians or the environment in regulations made under this Act. Application of the act must not undermine the protection of the health, safety and security of Canadians, their social and economic wellbeing and the environment. See also the David Suzuki Foundation and Ecojustice submission on the August 2, 2025, Notice of Intent.

documentation can discourage participation and make it difficult for impacted communities to access resources and technical support. There have been noted complexity and multiple levels of government that communities must navigate when working to address instances of environmental racism or injustice, including where transnational pollution may be a concern.⁴

Looking through an environmental equity lens, there needs to be a review of existing federal programs to determine which improvements could be made to break down barriers to assessing, addressing, and preventing environmental racism and injustice. This strategy should also seek to support building capacity directly in impacted communities, including by providing the necessary financial support to build that capacity.

Measures to support a whole-of-government approach

To bolster the strategy, we recommend updating — and systematically applying — the Cabinet Directive on Strategic Environmental and Economic Assessment to require analysis and consideration of effects on environmental equity in government decision-making. The absence of an environmental justice lens in the SEAA Directive — apart from impacts to Indigenous Peoples, their lands and traditional territories — is a critical oversight. Explicitly integrating equity considerations in SEAA would build on the Government of Canada's gender-based analysis plus approach, and reinforce it in the context of understanding who is impacted by climate change, biodiversity loss and other environmental effects of key government decisions.

The [Green Budget Coalition](#) has long recommended establishment of a high-level Office of Environmental Justice to elevate the profile of this mandate as a Government of Canada priority. We echo this recommendation of the Green Budget Coalition in this submission.

ECCC's environmental enforcement program

Uneven enforcement of environmental protection laws contributes to environmental racism and environmental injustice. Holding polluters accountable for violations that disproportionately impact Indigenous, racialized and low-income communities is an environmental justice priority. However, these communities face multiple barriers in accessing justice. The strategy should support a focus on investigations, compliance activities and enforcement action in relation to violations with environmental justice impacts, as well as outreach to communities facing environmental justice concerns.

⁴<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/strategic-policy-branch/environmental-justice/pi-symposium.html>

As mentioned above, legislative amendments to make the “citizen enforcement” provisions of CEPA more accessible and responsive could empower communities to directly address violations of CEPA requirements through Environmental Protection Actions.

The strategy should also seek to address how the federal government responds to reporting of incidents on environmental injustice. The strategy should investigate avenues for communities to contact the federal government, such as an ombudsperson to advocate for environmental justice within federal ministries.

Resource considerations

The strategy needs to be accompanied by the funding required to implement it well. As recommended by the Green Budget Coalition, this includes budgetary commitments to ensure permanent Government of Canada capacity to deliver the strategy (including additional resources for ECCC’s enforcement branch), as well as support for research and community engagement.

In the context of departmental expenditure reductions announced in Budget 2025, developing and implementing the strategy must be recognized and sustained as a core mandate initiative.

As well, the strategy should consider reforms to the Environmental Damages Fund so that fines collected for environmental violations benefit the affected communities. For example, this could involve a mechanism for redressing harms, funding community environmental priorities or building capacity for environmental protection and to participate in environmental decision-making.

Investing in the implementation of the strategy is not only a moral imperative, but also an investment that will reduce future costs by mitigating harm to human health, health care systems and the environment, as well as long-term legal, corporate and environmental risks and costs. Supporting well-informed policy planning is more cost-effective than reactive responses to harms.

Ongoing engagement

The strategy needs to include mechanisms to support ongoing engagement with the public and impacted communities. ECCC could consider, among other options, establishing a permanent advisory committee on assessing and preventing environmental racism and

advancing environmental justice. Engagement needs to continue after the development of the strategy to ensure that impacted communities are guiding the:

- Implementation of the strategy;
- Indicators being used to evaluate results;
- Assessment of data tools for usability;
- Addressing data gaps useful for communities;
- Reports to Parliament;
- Ongoing work to apply an equity lens to government laws, policies and programs.

Engagement must be meaningful and centre impacted communities, which requires resources and a commitment to accountability.

Thank you for considering our submissions in the development of the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice. We look forward to continuing to engage through the process of finalizing and implementing the strategy, which we see as critical in assessing, preventing and addressing environmental racism and injustice in Canada.

Sincerely,

Lisa Gue
National Policy Manager
David Suzuki Foundation
lgue@davidsuzuki.org

Sean O'Shea
Government Relations Specialist
Ecojustice
soshea@ecojustice.ca

Dakota Norris
Fossil Fuel Extraction Campaign
Manager, Canadian Association of
Physicians for the Environment
dakota@cape.ca

Shawn Smith
Staff Lawyer
West Coast Environmental Law
Association
ssmith@wcel.org

Cassie Barker
Senior Manager, Toxics Program
Environmental Defence
cbarker@environmentaldefence.ca

Theresa McLenaghan
Executive Director and Counsel
Canadian Environmental Law Association
theresa@ccla.ca

Annex

December 12, 2025

Joint statement on the development of a national strategy respecting environmental racism and environmental justice

The undersigned community organizations and allies express our support for the important work Environment and Climate Change Canada is undertaking to develop Canada's first national strategy to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and to advance environmental justice.

The National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, passed in 2024, mandates the minister to examine the links between racialization, socio-economic status and environmental risk, and to develop a national strategy setting out measures that can be taken to advance environmental justice and to assess, prevent and address environmental racism. The new law and strategy were met with much excitement by the public, hopeful that the opportunity to address environmental racism would finally become reality in Canada.

A credible strategy will:

- Address past, present and future cases of environmental racism;
- Centre impacted communities and commit to meaningful engagement and consultation;
- Introduce an environmental equity lens for decision-making across all government departments, including the new Major Projects Office;
- Incorporate data gathering and mapping, including consideration of ecological, social and cultural determinants of population health, not only health indicators;
- Reinforce related programs, policies and legislative mandates, including UNDRIPA and the right to a healthy environment under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*;
- Include a mechanism for co-ordinating with other levels of government, and seek to catalyze broader action;
- Be backed by adequate resources and capacity for implementation.

A 2020 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxic Wastes and Human Rights pointed to “a pattern in Canada where disadvantaged and under resourced groups, and Indigenous peoples in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada.” Racialized and Indigenous communities are frequently on the front lines of climate change and environmental

degradation, and more exposed to pollution. People in racialized and Indigenous communities can also face higher risks due to factors including their gender, sexual orientation, income, geographic location including rural and remote areas, immigration status and disability. Yet population exposure data in Canada is not typically disaggregated by race or income level, masking the problem. An equity lens on environmental policy and decision-making has too often been absent.

This new work is more important than ever, as the government pursues major projects on fast timelines and with reduced regulatory oversight. Exacerbating environmental racism and injustice is not in the national interest. Advancing environmental justice is a nation-building strategy.