

November 10, 2011

The Honourable Peter Kent
Minister of the Environment
Member of Parliament for Thornhill (Ontario)
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, 28th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0H3

Transmission by email: Peter.Kent@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Kent:

Re: Erosion of Public Participation on the Environment in Canada

On October 13, 2011, the federal government dealt a blow to public engagement in environmental decision making in Canada by informing the Canadian Environmental Network/ Réseau canadien de l'environnement (RCEN) by letter that it would not renew its financial support for 2011-12. As member organizations that are adversely affected by this decision, we request that you reverse this decision and restore core funding to the RCEN.

Established in 1977, the RCEN has facilitated communication between environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and the federal government, guided by its mission to facilitate networking and to provide public input on policies and practices affecting the environment and health. Since its inception, the RCEN has received core funding from Environment Canada. This funding is used to maintain a small staff at its national office, and to assist its regional affiliated networks across the country in their public engagement activities.

The RCEN consists of over 640 highly diverse non-profit organizations, including national organizations and community-based groups across Canada. Its members are environmental stewards of Canada, many of whom work tirelessly and mainly voluntarily on a broad range of issues. The RCEN is the thread that binds these groups. The RCEN has played an integral role in supporting the efforts of Canadian ENGOS to protect human health and the environment, especially for vulnerable populations. The RCEN is a clearinghouse for information on federal government environmental policies and decisions. We find this service invaluable for our work. ENGOS from abroad regard the RCEN as a unique model for networking, one worth emulating in their own countries.

For nearly 34 years, the RCEN has helped to develop collaboration among local, regional and national organizations on environmental matters. It has enabled its members, as representatives of the broader ENGO community, to actively engage in numerous broad-ranging consultations with the federal government, in parliamentary hearings, and in international negotiations. Contributions of RCEN member organizations have been essential

to key law reforms initiatives, such as the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA), and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA).

Under CEPA 1999, the federal government has committed to “encourage the participation of the people of Canada in the making of decisions that affect the environment;” (section 2(e)). The presence of the RCEN is key to ensuring public engagement by Canadian civil society. The absence of government funding to the RCEN is contrary to the spirit of the CEPA 1999. In fact, the federal government is clearly signalling its lack of commitment to provide support for meaningful public participation through the RCEN.

Without the services and operational structure provided by the RCEN, ENGOs face significant challenges to track and respond effectively to proposed environmental protection matters and collaborate with one another on issues of common interest. Not only will this action result in a much lower level of public engagement and response by the public, it will undermine transparency in government decision-making processes on environmental protection initiatives.

In the last fiscal year, the RCEN received core funding of approximately \$550,000. The cost to government to provide this core funding is a very small price to pay for the benefits accrued by including civil society representatives in government-led consultations on program and legislative reform initiatives.

The loss of federal financial support to the RCEN represents a tremendous loss for public engagement for environmental organizations across Canada and for all Canadians. The impacts will be felt not only now, but for years to come.

Our organizations are concerned that with greatly diminished capacity for public participation, the voices of Canadian ENGOs will not be heard. The erosion of public participation, coupled with severe cut-backs to Environment Canada and other departments addressing environmental protection, puts our health and environment, especially for vulnerable populations, at serious risk. This is a loss for civil society as a whole and a loss for democracy.

Canadians today, and our future generations, need a healthy environment. Our organizations, from coast to coast to coast are seeking commitment from the government to take the necessary steps to strengthen public engagement and promote transparency on environmental and health matters.

We are therefore urging you to restore core funding to the RCEN.

We look forward to your response and welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you.

Thank you for your consideration in this vital matter.

Sincerely,

Alberta Wilderness Association (Alberta), Carolyn Campbell: 403-283-2025

Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec – Environmental Health Association of Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) (Québec), Rohini Peris : 514-683-5701

Avon Peninsula Watershed Preservation Society (Nova Scotia), Raymond Parker: 902-792-0272

Bathurst Sustainable Development (New Brunswick), Brenda Kelley: 506-548-2106

Beyond Factory Farming (Saskatchewan), Cathy Holtslander: 306 955 6454

BirdSong Consulting (New Brunswick), Dorothy Diamond: 506-367-3181

Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation (Ontario), Norman Wingrove: 705-445-0357

Bow Valley Naturalists (Alberta), Mike McIvor: 403-762-4160

Camp Kawartha & The Camp Kawartha Outdoor Education Centre (Ontario), Jacob Rodenburg: 705-750-8943/705 652-3860

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (Ontario), Gideon Forman: 416-306-2273

Canadian Auto Workers Windsor Regional Environment Council (Ontario), Mark Bartlett: 519-974-5341

Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility (Québec), Gordon Edwards: 514-489-5118

Canadian Environmental Law Association (Ontario), Theresa McClenaghan: 416-960-2284

Canadian Land Trust Alliance (Ontario), Margo Sheppard: 613-284-4646

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Newfoundland and Labrador (CPAWS-NL) (Newfoundland and Labrador), Dr. David Rendell: 709-726-5800

Centre for Longterm Environmental Action (Newfoundland and Labrador), Linda Sheppard Whalen: 709-722-8769

Chemical Sensitivities Manitoba (Manitoba), Sandra Madray: 204-256-9390

CHOKED (British Columbia), Dave Stevens: 250-876-8939

Citizen Action to Protect the Environment (Nova Scotia), Barbara Gallagher: 902-633-2513

Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario (Ontario), Derek Coronado: 519-973-1116

Citizens' Stewardship Coalition (British Columbia), Maggie Paquet: 250-723-8802

Clean Air Champions (Ontario), Tricia Zakaria: 613-730-7353

Comité Justice et Solidarité de l'Unité Jean-Paul II (New Brunswick), Auréa Cormier: 506-204-1134

Conservation Corps Newfoundland and Labrador (Newfoundland and Labrador), Terry McNeil: 709-729-7267

Conservation Council of New Brunswick (New Brunswick), David Coon: 506-458-8747

Crooked Creek Conservancy Society of Athabasca (Alberta), Mary Richardson: 780-675-3144

David Suzuki Foundation (British Columbia), Jim Boothroyd: 604-732-4228

Durham Environment Watch (Ontario), Kerry Meydam: 905-436-2252

DurhamCLEAR (Ontario), Doug Anderson: 905-668-5040

Ecojustice (Ontario), Elaine MacDonald: 416-368-7533 ext. 527

Ecology Action Centre (Nova Scotia), Mark Butler: 902-429-5287

ElectroSmog Manitoba (Manitoba), Marg Friesen: 204-261-8591

Environmental Education Commission (Newfoundland and Labrador), Kate Williams: 709-753-1060

Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia (EHANS) (Nova Scotia), Karen Robinson: 902-457-3002

Environmental Project Management and Sustainable Solutions (Ontario), Greg Philliban: 613-760-6918

Falls Brook Centre, (New Brunswick), Jean Arnold: 506-375-8143/506-375-4310

Friends of Cathedral Grove (British Columbia), David Boehm: 250-247-8698

Friends of Musquash (New Brunswick), Anne Riley: 506-672-4807

Friends of Rockwood Park Inc. (New Brunswick), Joan Pearce: 506-652-1551

GPI Atlantic (Nova Scotia), Gwendolyn Colman: 902-823-1944 ext. 04

Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station Inc. (New Brunswick), Laurie Murison: 506-662-3804

Grand Riverkeeper Labrador, Inc. (Newfoundland and Labrador), Roberta Frampton Benefiel: 709-896-4164

Great Lakes United (Ontario), John Jackson: 519-744-7503

Greenspiration (Ontario), Angela Bischoff: 416-260-2080 ext. 1

Halton Environmental Network (Ontario), Lisa Seiler: 905-299-2327

Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Cooperative (Saskatchewan), Stefania Fortugno: 306-653-0898

International Institute of Concern for Public Health (Ontario), Anna Tilman: 905-841-0095

Keepers of the Athabasca Watershed Council (Alberta), Janice Pitman: 780-675-5251

Kelligrews Ecological Enhancement Program (KEEP) (Newfoundland and Labrador), Karen Morris: 709-834-4915

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (Ontario), Barbara McElgunn: 416-281-9676

Living Oceans Society (British Columbia), Mary Lindsay: 250-973-6580

London and District Labour Council (Ontario), Jim Mahon: 519-681-3680

Maliseet Nation Conservation Council (MNCC) (New Brunswick), Aruna Jayawardane: 506-472-1885

Maritime Aboriginal Peoples Council (Nova Scotia), Roger J. Hunka: 902-895-2982

Memorial University's Advisory Committee on Sustainability (Newfoundland and Labrador), Toby Rowe: 709-864-2637

Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice (Newfoundland and Labrador), Sister Mary Tee: 709-722-0082

MiningWatch Canada (Ontario), Jamie Kneen: 613-569-3439

My Sustainable Canada (Ontario), Tania Del Matto/Linda Varangu: 519-886-3699

National Network on Environments and Women's Health (National), Dayna Nadine Scott: 416-736-5721

Nature NB (New Brunswick), Vanessa Roy-McDougall: 506-459-4209

Nature Newfoundland and Labrador (Newfoundland and Labrador), John D. Jacobs: 709-738-3147

Nature Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan), Donna Bruce: 306-956-3437

Nature Trust of NB (New Brunswick), Renata Woodward: 506-367-3181

New Brunswick Environmental Law Society/Société pour l'avancement du droit environnemental de Nouveau Brunswick (New Brunswick), Neil Gardner: 506-389-8999

New Brunswick Environmental Network (NBEN), Mary Ann Coleman: 506-433-6101

New Brunswick Lung Association (New Brunswick), Barbara M. MacKinnon: 506-455-8961 ext. 102

Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network (Newfoundland and Labrador), Chris Hogan: 709-753-7898

Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Educators (NLEE) (Newfoundland and Labrador), Margaret McKeon: 709-637-4033

Northeast Avalon ACAP Inc. (Newfoundland and Labrador), Kathleen Parewick: 709-726-9673

Northwatch (Ontario), Brennain Lloyd: 705-497-0373

Nova Scotia Environmental Network (Nova Scotia), Janelle Frail: 902-454-6846/Sheila Cole: 902-444-4291

One Earth Initiative Society (British Columbia), Emmanuel Prinet: 604-669-5143

Ontario Clean Air Alliance (Ontario), Jack Gibbons: 416-260-2080 ext.1

Ontario Environment Network (Ontario), Leslie Adams: 705-840-2888

PANE (for a new perspective on Energy) (New Brunswick), Beth McLaughlin: 506-854-6377

Pictou County Watershed Coalition (Nova Scotia), Ron Kelly: 902-485-6048

Plenty Canada (Ontario), Larry McDermott: 613-278-2215

Prairie Institute for Human Ecology (Saskatchewan), Lynn Oliphant: 306-374-1068

Prairie Learning Centre (Saskatchewan), Christie Thomson: 306-298-4495

Progressive Organizing Project (Saskatchewan), Tim Quigley: 306-373-7561

Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources (P.O.W.E.R.) (Ontario), Brendan Smith: 905-873-1820

Public for the Protection of the Forests of New Brunswick (New Brunswick), Roger Babin: 506-775-6639

Raven Recycling Society (Yukon), Val Loewen: 867-667-5281

Reach for Unbleached Foundation (British Columbia), Delores Broten: 250-339-6117

Saint John Citizens Coalition for Clean Air (New Brunswick), Gordon Dalzell: 506-696-3510

Saskatchewan Boreal Forest learning Centre (Saskatchewan), John Murray: 306-652-0609

Saskatchewan Eco-Network (Saskatchewan), Paddy Tutty: 306-652-1275

Saskatchewan Environmental Society (Saskatchewan), Allyson Brady: 306-665-1915

Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council (Saskatchewan), Joanne Fedyk: 306-931-3242

Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition (Ontario), Debbe Crandall: 905-841-9200

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Cape Breton Group (Nova Scotia) Bruno Marcocchio: 902-567-1132

Sierra Club BC (British Columbia), George Heyman: 250-386-5255

Sierra Club Canada - Atlantic Canada Chapter - Northeast Avalon Group (Newfoundland and Labrador), Fred Winsor: 709-738-3781

Sierra Club Canada - Atlantic Canada Chapter (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador), Gretchen Fitzgerald: 902-444-3113

Sierra Club Prairie Chapter (Alberta), Eriel Deranger: 709-437-5097

Sustainability Project - 7th Generation Initiative (Ontario), Mike Nickerson: 613-482-1208

Sustainable Energy Group (New Brunswick), Sam Arnold: 506-328-9420

Torbay Environment and Trails Committee (Newfoundland and Labrador), Helen Spencer: 709-437-5097

Tusket River Environmental Protection Association (Nova Scotia), John Sollows: 902-742-2802

Victims of Chemical Valley (Ontario), Ada Lockridge: 519-383-8992

West Coast Environmental Law Association (British Columbia), Jessica Clogg: 604-684-7378

Whale Release and Strandings (Newfoundland and Labrador), Julie Huntington: 709-895-3003

York Region Environmental Alliance (Ontario), Gloria Marsh: 905-660-9782

Yukon Environmental Network (Yukon Territory), Lewis Rifkind: 867-668-5678

Zero Waste 4 Zero Burning (Ontario), Linda Gasser: 905-665-5789/Louis Bertrand: 905-259-8925