



Geoffrey F. Bruce Fellowship in Canadian Freshwater Policy

October 20, 2020

Mr. Terry Duguid
Honourable Member of Parliament
House of Commons
Government of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Mr. Duguid,

This submission outlines 10 recommendations related to the proposed Canada Water Agency from our perspective as Bruce Fellows in Canadian Freshwater Policy.

Geoffrey F. Bruce was a Canadian federal public servant and distinguished diplomat whose long career included serving as Secretary General of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in the 1970s and 80s. During his life and career, he was dedicated to environment and water issues in Canada and internationally. In honour of his life's work, his wife Erika Bruce established the Bruce Fellowships in Canadian Freshwater Policy to provide funding to support Canada's next generation of water policy practitioners and freshwater policy leaders.

We recommend that the new Canada Water Agency:

1) Be based on building a new water ethic that recognizes Indigenous values and puts water at the heart of Reconciliation.

The starting point for the new Canada Water Agency must be the 'truth' related to enduring water challenges in Canada and making 'reconciliation' a key cornerstone of the federal government's water policy framework. This must involve acknowledgment of inherent rights of Indigenous peoples as stewards of water, the special role of women as water keepers, and true collaboration with Indigenous nations on water governance at the community scale, in the North and across the country. Indigenous peoples and communities also have much to teach us about the value of water and a new water ethic based on respect and sustainability.

2) Make water rights and citizenship founding principles of the Agency and engagement the foundation of building capacity for national, transboundary, and community-based water governance.

Water is central to Canadian identity. It is a national treasure and important part of all cultures that make up Canada. The Canada Water Agency must build water citizenship at all levels by making water a fundamental human right in Canadian law and by investing in awareness of its national value, equitable access, and stewardship.



3) Formalize a new approach to water governance in a new Canada Water Act.

Canada needs to update its federal water law. It is inconceivable that Canada has not updated its federal water statute since 1970 and the 1987 Federal Water Policy remains only an aspirational document and unfulfilled statement of the need for federal leadership. While provincial jurisdiction and laws are important, responsibility at the provincial and territorial level is necessary but not sufficient, given the national significance of water.

4) Put knowledge, science, data, and Indigenous knowledge at the center of an evidence-driven mandate.

Canada must become a leader in water knowledge and science. Now and in the future, knowledge, science and data are critical for water innovation, stewardship and action at all levels. It is clear that jurisdictions with water knowledge, science and data will be the most sustainable and prosperous in the future. They will be best able to balance human uses and ecosystem sustainability. They will be the most successful in adapting to climate change. Investments in Indigenous knowledge, citizen science, professional science, integrating water knowledge and data, and scaling the freshwater data commons should be at the center of the Agency's mandate.

5) Adopt and invest in a 'one-water' approach that balances ecosystem and human values in sustainable water governance.

The existing water policy framework is based on an outdated approach, on separate regimes for surface water and groundwater; water quantity and quality; drinking water, wastewater and storm water. It is based on prioritizing human uses, large-scale, expensive grey water infrastructure vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Agency should prioritize investments in 'one-water' programs, projects, infrastructure, science and technologies.

6) Have a focus on investments in next generation blue-green infrastructure, water technology, water stewards, entrepreneurs and practitioners. Blue-green stimulus should be a central mandate of the new agency in the post-COVID decade.

Water governance is not just an environment or economy issue. Investors and entrepreneurs around the world are increasingly aware that economies of the future will be based on blue-green technologies and investments. The Agency should be a strong catalyst for sustainable investment and transformation in order to help Canada move from a fossil-fuel economy to a circular economy that yields returns on investment in a freshwater supercluster, blue-green technologies, and jobs.

7) Provide leadership at the national level for Indigenous, rural and urban communities.

Jurisdictional issues must not be barriers related to national leadership and community investments. The Agency must be the stimulus for investment in First Nations and Indigenous communities, rural communities and cities, particularly related to infrastructure, technology, stewardship, knowledge and data collection, including citizen-science. In keeping with a 'one-water' approach, the Agency should provide leadership and investments for cities and communities to work with partners to develop and implement integrated standards for drinking water, wastewater, storm water, water reuse, and monitoring.

8) Be led by an inter-ministerial and intergovernmental management board.

Water is central to many issues and sectors. Water governance requires national, transboundary, intergovernmental, and inter-Ministerial leadership. The Agency should have a Management Board that prioritizes leadership and resources for action; public interests over private interests; and includes: Indigenous leaders, key federal departments, provinces and territories (perhaps modelled on the Canada Revenue Agency Management Board and connected to the long-standing efforts of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment); and municipal representation to reflect the future significance of smart cities and communities in innovative water management, stewardship, and watershed governance.

9) Engage young Canadians, Indigenous youth, newcomer youth, and the next generation of water leaders.

The Agency must engage the next generation differently. It must partner with organizations and actors who have successful track records with young people and engage Indigenous youth and newcomer youth, through social media, youth water challenges, investments in internship opportunities, and investments in the next generation of water leaders and practitioners through post-secondary funding. The Agency should also have a strategic priority to employ youth and have youth leaders on its management board.

10) Have a global mandate.

Canada needs to become a global leader in water governance. For decades Canada has been virtually absent in important global organizations with water governance agendas. As a country with water wealth, the Agency needs to be actively engaged in water issues in the global arena. This important role is something Geoffrey Bruce understood deeply as international engagement is the foundation of innovation, equity and sustainability. The Agency must play a role in supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 6, to ensure access to water and sanitation for all. It must contribute to international partnerships, particularly related to water security, climate migration, and sharing innovative technologies and best practices. To fulfil this mandate, the new Canada Water Agency should have dedicated staff and resources for Canada to develop and enhance its role in global water governance forums.

In closing, we thank you for leading the public consultation and engagement process related to the proposed Canada Water Agency. We hope you will consider our submission on behalf of Canada's next generation of water leaders and practitioners.

Sincerely,

Katherine Minich, Bruce Fellow 2018
Edgar Tovilla, Bruce Fellow 2018
Madeleine Martin, Bruce Fellow 2019
Michelle Woodhouse, Bruce Fellow 2019
Caroline John, Bruce Fellow 2020
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