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Open Letter to Prime Minister Carney: Only Projects That Check All 7 Boxes Deserve the Greenlight

Groups urge federal government to adopt clear standards for defining “national interest” under Bill C-5

x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & səliwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Territories / VANCOUVER

A coalition of Canada’s leading environmental, nature and climate organizations has sent an [open letter](#) to Prime Minister Mark Carney and key Cabinet ministers calling on the federal government to adopt seven clear, transparent criteria for determining which projects are truly in the national interest under the *Building Canada Act* (Bill C-5). The letter follows last Friday’s announcement that Dawn Farrell, former CEO of Trans Mountain Corp., will lead the new Major Projects Office in Calgary, and arrives as the Cabinet meets this week to consider a first round of projects to fast track.

As another summer of heat waves, drought and wildfires displaces thousands of Canadians, the groups warn that projects fast-tracked under the new law must strengthen communities, uphold Indigenous rights and guard against extreme weather events. Climate disasters are already undermining economic security, health and affordability – costing billions each year – while research shows investments in clean energy, nature restoration and resilience deliver long-term benefits.

The letter points to projects like high-speed rail, renewable energy and inter-provincial transmission, clean drinking water and telecommunications services in Indigenous communities as true nation-building efforts, not pipelines that put coasts at risk and pit communities against each other.

As the letter states, to be considered to be in the national interest, projects should:

- Strengthen Canada’s autonomy, resilience, security and identity;
- Have a high likelihood of successful execution and represent an economically viable undertaking;
- Advance reconciliation and uphold the rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the standard of free, prior, and informed consent;
- Have undergone early planning in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and with expert and public participation, and adhere to any guidelines produced by the minister or the major federal projects office;

- Foster sustainability;
- Help, and not hinder the Government of Canada’s ability to meet its environmental and human rights obligations or its commitments in respect of climate change; and
- Not produce fossil fuels or transport fossil fuels for export.

QUOTES:

“The government says it’s acting in the national interest, but Canadians deserve to know what that actually means. We’ve defined it clearly: projects must uphold Indigenous rights, protect the environment and build a sustainable future. The decision to appoint a former pipeline CEO to lead the Major Projects Office heightens concern about whose interests will really be prioritized. But if the government commits to strong, transparent standards, it can still ensure that future projects strengthen communities and move Canada closer to meeting its climate obligations.”

– Jessica Clogg, Executive Director and Senior Counsel, West Coast Environmental Law

“As the federal government begins to designate national interest projects in Schedule 1 of the Building Canada Act, CELA recommends that the focus should be on projects which would enhance the health, safety and environment of Indigenous peoples and under-served and under-resourced communities across the country. For example, a priority for the federal government in designating national interest projects should be to close the infrastructure gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. For any specific project, there must be meaningful consultation and co-development of projects with potentially impacted Indigenous peoples.”

– Richard Lindgren, Counsel and Acting Executive Director, Canadian Environmental Law Association

“With the passage of the Building Canada Act, the Prime Minister signaled a commitment to nation-building as a path to long-term economic security. This is an opportunity to shape a stronger, more resilient Canada—one that upholds Indigenous rights, protects our climate, and supports a healthy environment. The seven criteria are designed to ensure we invest in projects that will stand the test of time—projects that make sense not just today, but in the future we’re building toward. There is no shortage of opportunity to do this, including renewable energy and energy corridors here in Atlantic Canada.”

– Lisa Mitchell, Executive Director, East Coast Environmental Law

“As Canada aims to become an energy superpower and diversify its trade relationships, the Major Projects Office must ensure all decisions align with the country’s legal climate obligations. The International Court of Justice has confirmed states are legally bound to prevent activities that worsen climate change. This duty is not abstract, it applies directly to infrastructure, energy policy, and public investment. Approving carbon-intensive projects risks breaching this duty, undermines Canada’s climate commitments, and jeopardizes future competitiveness in a global economy shifting rapidly toward low-carbon goods and supply chains.”

– Sabaa Khan, Climate Director and Director General (Québec & Atlantic Canada), David Suzuki Foundation

“Building Canada’s future means investing in infrastructure, but we need to stop treating nature like a barrier and start recognizing it as one of our greatest assets. Nature cannot continue to provide for us if we continue to harm it. Projects must be planned with care, guided by Indigenous leadership and free, prior, and informed consent and considering environmental impacts. These are not side issues, they are central to long-term success. Let’s build smarter, not just faster, and make sure our decisions reflect our values and create a future worthy of all Canadians.”

– Sandra Schwartz, National Executive Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)

“Projects of national interest help to secure Canada's long-term economic prosperity. In today's world, that has to mean advancing reconciliation by truly collaborating with Indigenous Peoples, protecting and restoring the natural world that sustains us, and powering through the energy transition and phasing out fossil fuels. This period of nation building cannot be about building more fossil fuel projects, which all credible international bodies have said are incompatible with a stable climate. The government must protect the health and safety of Canadians who are facing escalating wildfires, extreme weather and climate impacts.”

– Tim Gray, Executive Director, Environmental Defence Canada

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[View the full open letter here](#)