
May 28, 2020

Dear Premier McNeil, Ministers, Deputies, Leaders of the Opposition, Critics, and government staff:

On behalf of the Ecology Action Centre, we would like to acknowledge and thank the provincial government for its efforts to protect the health and well-being of Nova Scotians in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

As the province plans its recovery, the EAC would like to provide input on how Nova Scotia can align needed stimulus measures with core environmental objectives through a lens of just recovery. In doing so, Nova Scotia can maximize benefits to all during these unprecedented times and beyond.

For half a century, the EAC has been providing leadership on critical issues from biodiversity protection to climate change to environmental justice. The pandemic has exposed many of the same societal inequalities found at the root of the climate crisis; inequalities Nova Scotians have long grappled with.

Environmental protection and social justice are not only deeply intertwined, they are also critical to our capacity to take care of each other now and into the future. As such, the EAC proposes the following as you continue your work to ensure Nova Scotia emerges from this crisis stronger and more resilient than ever.

Invest in a sustainable economy

In October, Nova Scotia committed to the strongest GHG emissions targets in Canada. Implementing steps right now to achieve these targets will help chart our course for economic recovery.

A [recent report](#) by Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists Ltd. commissioned by EAC shows how we can substantially increase the economic prosperity of Nova Scotia, creating more than 15,000 green jobs per year in the province by 2030.

To rebuild a sustainable economy, we must:

- Supply 90% of NS electricity needs with renewable energy by displacing coal, oil, and large-scale biomass electricity generation with wind, hydro, solar, limited small-scale biomass projects for space heating, and community-scale projects;
- Make 100% of eligible social housing Net-Zero Energy Ready (NZER) and ensure all new construction is built to NZER standards;

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- Triple energy efficiency in our electricity sector, which will save money, help avoid the need for new electricity system infrastructure, and support a just transition to more sustainable jobs for workers;
 - Transform Nova Scotia's public transportation system by electrifying public transit and ensuring all municipalities in Nova Scotia are accessible by active transportation;
 - Implement policy, infrastructure, and incentives to ensure Nova Scotia meets the federal target of 100% of all new light-duty vehicle sales electric by 2040;
 - Make it easier for Nova Scotians to purchase directly from local, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture by improving local distribution networks and supporting infrastructure, access to value-adding and processing options for harvesters pursuing innovative, direct-marketing initiatives;
 - Develop regulations and infrastructure to increase local processing capacity and support market access for small-scale producers;
 - Invest in apprenticeship programs and financial support to attract youth and diverse participants into the sustainable inshore fisheries sector and ensure the succession of these licences and livelihoods in coastal communities; and
 - Increase support for succession planning on Nova Scotian farms, and reward the use of sustainable and regenerative farming practices.

Now is the time to seize this opportunity to legislate ambitious, equitable, and inclusive climate goals so all Nova Scotian communities can prosper in a sustainable economy with a high quality of life, leaving no one behind.

Embracing these goals is also an opportunity for innovation, entrepreneurship, youth retention, immigration, and to become a world leader for workers. Upgrading our homes will make us more comfortable and reduce GHG emissions and other pollution that threatens our health.

Increase community food security

Community food security exists when all community residents have access to enough healthy, safe food available through a food system that can be sustained for generations to come, and that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. Our current circumstances are a powerful reminder that to reach community food security food must be treated as a public good.

In recent weeks, many gaps in our food system have become more evident. Food has been recognized as essential since the outset of Nova Scotia's emergency response, but across jurisdictions there is uncertainty around how government can effectively ensure production and access.

It is clear that Nova Scotia must dramatically bolster self-reliance and resilience by supporting local producers; investing in increased processing, storage, and distribution capacity; enabling locally-based market innovation; and addressing inequities in food access. Nova Scotia can look to, and

invest in, community-led networks, which are uniquely situated to close gaps in food access for our most vulnerable communities.

Vulnerabilities in our highly globalized seafood supply chains have also been highlighted through this crisis. Nova Scotia's approximately 10,000 small-scale fishing families are among those being deeply impacted, facing collapsed global seafood markets, opaque health and safety guidelines, rapid moves towards market consolidation, and a lack of comprehensive regulatory and financial supports. These impacts are already having immeasurable effects on the livelihoods and coastal communities that make up the backbone of our culture and economy.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, more and more Nova Scotians are thinking about our local food supply and where our food comes from. Now is the time to make ambitious moves towards community food security in Nova Scotia's and re-examine the targeted support for sustainable, small scale fisheries, aquaculture, and agriculture. To this end, we urge the province to take the following steps:

- Invest in community-led networks, and the people that operate them, to support their work addressing the complex challenge of food insecurity;
- Continue to honour treaty rights and learn from the region's longest-running experts on sustainable food production;
- Invest in and support the physical and social infrastructure that helps community-led networks grow their capacity to foster increased food security, food sovereignty, and community resilience;
- Ensure small co-operatives and businesses can access recently announced seafood processing sector COVID-19 relief funds
- Invest in community-based 'quota and license banking' programs to keep fishing access in rural communities;
- Acknowledge the important role played by local and municipal government in Nova Scotia and around the world, as demonstrated by the Milan Urban Food Pact, in addressing complex, locally-felt challenges;
- Work with local producers to ensure access to all necessary factors of food production, learn about how the Temporary Foreign Workers Programs can be improved, and grow the domestic agriculture workforce.

Nova Scotia features a unique mixture of soil, water, climate, and infrastructure, which provides an advantage for small-scale food production. Let's lean into this advantage. As we move forward, we must not forget the role our grocery store workers, farmers, and producers have played as front-line workers. We must continue to look at how we ensure their health, safety, and economic security.

Build active, resilient and complete communities

The current pandemic and the temporary restrictions on access to nature, and active transportation routes, have highlighted the needs and vulnerabilities in our communities. Limiting access to parks and trails clarified the degree to which Nova Scotians value nature and outdoor recreation for physical and mental health, yet have also emphasized existing disparities of proximity to nature and trails. Nature can help our communities build resiliency through crises. Prioritizing building complete communities with access to essential services, affordable housing and reducing car-dependent growth is also essential to our resiliency.

Nova Scotia has the ability to address these vulnerabilities, building healthy and resilient communities ready for the challenges ahead by taking the following steps:

- Invest in equitable access to parks and trails, including a full implementation and resourcing of the provincial Trails Strategy and collaborating to fully implement the Halifax Green Network Plan;
- Support Nova Scotian municipalities in developing and retrofitting to create complete communities, where residents can access essential services in their neighbourhood using active and public transit; and
- Minimize car dependent growth and invest in active transportation infrastructure to make it easier for Nova Scotians to safely travel between work, home, and greenspaces.

Strengthen resiliency to future crises through ecosystem protection

Imposed restrictions in access to parks and trails has made it clearer than ever how much we all value nature. Now, we need to protect it. Protecting nature is not just good for addressing biodiversity loss and ensuring ecosystems services persist; our health and well-being benefit from protected areas too. Additional co-benefits from protected areas include Indigenous-led conservation and cultural restoration, and opportunities for [commercial benefits](#).

Formally protecting more land in Nova Scotia can make us more resilient and help us prepare for future crises, including the climate crisis. In Nova Scotia, more than 87% of the land remains unprotected, yet protecting carbon capturing ecosystems (especially forests) is one of the best ways to combat climate change as well as biodiversity loss. The number one cause of biodiversity loss is "changes in land and sea use" - in other words, habitat loss. Protected areas prevent habitat loss, and welcome people.

Protecting ocean areas is equally important for a sustainable future. Currently, 86% of Canada's marine and coastal waters are unprotected despite the fact that healthy oceans are critical for

combating climate change and the biodiversity crisis, and supporting sustainable fisheries and vibrant communities.

We need more protected land and ocean to survive along with our fellow species.

Nova Scotia has the ability to take immediate action on protected areas thanks to our existing Parks and Protected Areas Plan. Many areas of land that need to be protected have already been identified, assessed, and consulted on. These critical nature areas are simply awaiting designation by Cabinet. The province can also work productively with its federal counterparts to ensure that proposed protected areas in the marine environment move through to designation.

There are many viable, sustainable opportunities in front of us. Rather than promoting highly polluting or environmentally damaging industries like gold mining, biomass for electricity, open-net pen salmon “farms”, Nova Scotia can pivot to support only truly green industries that do not damage the environment.

We recommend the following actions:

- Formally protect (designate) ALL the remaining “candidate” areas identified in the Parks and Protected Areas Plan. This would bring Nova Scotia to just under 14% protection;
- Provide the Provincial Park system and the Protected Areas system with the needed resources to properly manage parks and protected areas;
- In line with Canada's national and international obligations, commit to formally protecting least 17 percent of the total land mass of Nova Scotia by 2025 and provide the resources to manage this network;
- Work with the federal government to move proposed marine protected areas and marine refuges in Nova Scotia through to designation, and support the federal commitment to 25% protection by 2025;
- Increase provincial support for Indigenous-led conservation. Promising initiatives are already underway with substantial federal support – now we need to province to step-up;
- Fully implement the Independent Review of Forestry Practices (The Lahey Report), in order to better manage our carbon-capturing forests, and to conserve and restore forest health and biodiversity;
- Move to quickly implement the Coastal Protection Act; and
- Ban the use of forest biomass for electricity generation, both for domestic (Nova Scotia) and foreign consumption (exports).

These are unprecedented times. Thank you again for your efforts to protect the health and well-being of Nova Scotians. We join you in applauding the extraordinary efforts of nurses, doctors,

teachers, health workers, senior care providers, first responders, front line workers, public servants, and community leaders for working tirelessly to keep our citizens and communities safe and healthy.

We're in this together. Recovering from the impacts of the pandemic and the associated economic downturn, while preparing ourselves for the future climate crisis, will require transformative change at every level of society. At the EAC, we believe the steps we take today can make us more resilient to the impending climate change and biodiversity loss crises. We believe that together we can reimagine and rebuild the economy while ensuring our communities are secure, healthy and resilient, and no one is left behind.

As we continue to move forward, know that the staff of the Ecology Action Centre are here to work alongside you in finding solutions.

Sincerely,



Marla MacLeod
Director of Programs
Ecology Action Centre