



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Office of Environmental Justice

The Green Budget Coalition recommends funding the establishment of a permanent, high-level Office of Environmental Justice, housed at ECCC, to:

- Lead development of a national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice and support its implementation;
- Work with ECCC’s enforcement branch to advance environmental justice through the enforcement of federal environmental laws in underserved communities;
- Develop a publicly-accessible screening and mapping tool that overlays environmental and socio-demographic data; and
- Develop collaborative partnerships and manage a new environmental justice communities grants fund.

Background

Too often in Canada, racialized and disadvantaged communities bear a disproportionate burden from environmental degradation and preventable environmental health hazards, such as pollution and toxic substances in consumer products. Environmental injustice exacerbates climate change impacts and other inequities that these communities experience.

The Government of Canada needs to invest in institutional capacity, as well as research and policy development, to ensure that environmental protection programs, policies, investments and laws account for population-level inequities and advance environmental justice.

Photo: Joris Buegels

COMPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Fair treatment means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.⁸⁸

Source: U.S. EPA Office of Environmental Justice

National strategy

Bill C-226, the *National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act*, requires the minister of environment and climate change to develop a strategy to advance environmental justice and assess, prevent and address environmental racism. The Green Budget Coalition notes that ECCC reallocated resources in 2022 to initiate work and prepare for consultations on the strategy.

We recommend Budget 2024 confirm funding to complete development of the strategy, and formally establish a permanent and high-level Office of Environmental Justice. This Office would provide institutional capacity needed to support implementation of the strategy, on an on-going basis, as well as related environmental justice requirements in recent amendments to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (Bill S-5). This Office should also be consulted on program design to ensure that federal climate and nature programs will benefit communities that have historically been overburdened by environmental harm.

A model exists in the United States; the EPA Office of Environmental Justice was established in the early 1990s. In 2021, President Biden established a White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council to “bring greater visibility to environmental justice issues across the Federal Government.”⁸⁹

88 Environmental Protection Agency, “Learn About Environmental Justice, US EPA.” <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice>.

89 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/white-house-environmental-justice-advisory-council/>

Recommended Investment:
\$125 million over five years, and then \$25 million per year, ongoing [ECCC]

Environmental enforcement

Uneven enforcement of environmental protection laws contributes to environmental racism and environmental injustice. Holding polluters accountable for violations that disproportionately impact Indigenous, BIPOC, and low-income communities is an environmental justice priority. However, these communities face multiple barriers in accessing justice.

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) announced a new comprehensive environmental justice enforcement strategy and established a dedicated Office of Environmental Justice. The DoJ Office of Environmental Justice will support investigations and litigation in relation to violations with environmental justice impacts, as well as outreach to communities facing environmental justice concerns.

The Canadian Office of Environmental Justice should play a similar role. Additional resources are needed to enable ECCC’s enforcement branch to prioritize and enhance compliance and enforcement activities that will have the greatest impact on communities most overburdened by environmental harm. Funds received from fines, court orders and voluntary payments as a result of enforcement action should be earmarked for projects that will benefit the affected community and advance environmental justice.

Recommended Investment:
\$200 million over five years, and then \$40 million per year, ongoing [ECCC]

Screening and mapping tool

Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022 included a commitment to enhance collection of disaggregated data (i.e., data that can be broken down by meaningful categories of race and/or ethno-cultural origins). However, this information is missing from important environmental databases and indicators, such as the National Pollutant Release Inventory, the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators, and ambient air quality reporting.

The U.S. EPA Office of Environmental Justice

developed “EJScreen”, an online mapping and screening tool that provides a nationally consistent dataset and approach for integrating environmental and sociodemographic indicators. We recommend ECCC develop a screening tool in consultation with the public. It should include data on Indigeneity, race, income and other socio-demographic indicators. Not only will this help identify locations with potential environmental justice concerns and environmental health risks, it will also enable ECCC to measure and track the effectiveness of the new strategy. Federal environmental databases and indicators should also be expanded to enable environmental justice analysis.

Recommended Investment:

\$30 million in 2024 to develop the tool, **then \$10 million per year, ongoing, starting in 2025** for ongoing data collection. [ECCC]

Collaborative partnerships and grants

The Canadian Office of Environmental Justice will be well-placed to play a convening role, bringing together relevant federal departments and agencies (e.g., inter-departmental working groups), leveraging external expertise (e.g., an independent advisory

committee), explore collaboration with Indigenous and provincial/territorial governments, and engaging with communities. We also recommend a new environmental justice community grants fund to be managed by the Office of Environmental Justice. The fund could be used to enable community groups to hire technical experts, participate in consultative processes, and fund local solutions (among other needs).

Recommended Investment [ECCC]:

- **\$10 million over five years, and then \$2 million per year, ongoing**, to support collaborative partnerships; and
- **\$150 million over five years** for community grants.

Total Recommended Investment [ECCC]:

\$555 million over five years, followed by \$77 million per year, ongoing

Contacts

Lisa Gue – lgue@dauidsuzuki.org
 Jacqueline Wilson – jacqueline@cela.ca
 Muhannad Malas – mmalas@ecojustice.ca



Photo: Mapbox