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April 19, 2022

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
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[ministre-minister@ec.gc.ca](mailto:ministre-minister@ec.gc.ca)

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

When Budget 2022 was released on April 7, we were shocked and disappointed by the unexpected divestment from regional freshwater-protection initiatives, including the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program.

The Liberal Party's 2021 election platform committed to a 10-year, \$1 billion Freshwater Action Plan. The mandate letter you received from the Prime Minister directed your department to make a "historic investment... to protect and restore larger lakes and river systems," including the Lake Winnipeg Basin.

Yet Budget 2022 promised just \$19.6 million for a single year – for eight watersheds.

Last month we shared with you a federal report card on Lake Winnipeg. In that report card, we initially assigned a B grade in anticipation of the promised renewal of the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program in Budget 2022. That grade has now been downgraded to an F in the revised report card attached here.

We have previously expressed concerns that the potential formation of a new federal water agency would unnecessarily delay urgent action needed to improve the health of Lake Winnipeg. Our concerns have unfortunately been confirmed with Budget 2022, which allocates \$43.5 million over five years to the creation of the new agency, while delaying and defunding long-standing regional water initiatives like the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program.

From 2008 to 2022, the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program invested in regionally focused research and phosphorus-reduction initiatives – and was continuously refined by

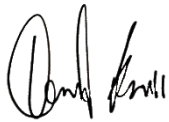
collaborative input from local stakeholders and government staff. While certainly not perfect, the program was methodically improved through each of its three past phases. Specifically, each successive phase strengthened focus on Indigenous engagement and better targeted phosphorus-reduction activities to known phosphorus hotspots. While there is more to do to advance both of these priorities (see actions 2.2 and 3.2 in the attached report card), all of the progress made to date through the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program is now at risk of being lost completely.

The proposed Canada Water Agency – still lacking clear purpose, objectives and deliverables after two years of discussion – is not an adequate alternative to watershed-level protection efforts. Indeed, by displacing regional water programs in Budget 2022, the establishment of a new national agency is already diverting time and resources away from urgent phosphorus-reduction and Indigenous-engagement priorities within the Lake Winnipeg watershed.

We are renewing our request to meet with you to discuss the future of the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program and the federal government's ongoing support for tangible action and measurable results in the Lake Winnipeg watershed.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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**Enclosures: 1**

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