

For Immediate Release
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Communities across province unite behind proposed Environmental Bill of Rights

The bill would enshrine the right to a healthy environment in law and specifically address the concerns of marginalized communities

K'JIPUKTUK/HALIFAX – In advance of Earth Day, a coalition of environmental and community leaders, including representatives from Boat Harbour, Harrietsfield, Lincolnville, Sipekne'katik, and Shelburne will join together to propose a new non-partisan bill to protect the right of all Nova Scotians to a healthy environment.

“Without a right to a healthy environment the people of Nova Scotia do not have the legal tools they need when decisions, made outside of their control, leave them in a polluted community, threatening their health and environment,” said Lisa Mitchell, Executive Director of the East Coast Environmental Law Association, “Access to clean water, unpolluted air and uncontaminated land should be a fundamental right for all people, and yet it is not.”

While similar laws exist in other provinces, this is the first time that a proposed Environmental Bill of Rights recognizes the unique concerns of traditionally marginalized or vulnerable communities.

Ingrid Waldron, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Health Professions and Director of the Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequities and Community Health Project (ENRICH), explained that the Bill's attention to marginalized communities reflects the reality of environmental racism in Nova Scotia. “Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities are disproportionately burdened by the health risks associated with polluting industries and other environmentally hazardous activities.”

“If we want to ensure that all Nova Scotians have a right to a healthy environment, our policies must strategically target the ills they are meant to relieve in communities most affected by those ills,” Waldron said.

The Bill is the work of the Environmental Rights Working Group (ERWG), a coalition of whose mandate is to create legally-based environmental rights in Nova Scotia. Members include the Ecology Action Centre, Sierra Club of Canada, the ENRICH Project, law students and several others. The East Coast Environmental Law Association initiated the ERWG in 2014 as part of a regional effort to draw attention to environmental rights in Atlantic Canada, in keeping with a growing movement across Canada.

Private member Bills on Environmental Racism (Bill 111) and Environmental Rights (Bill 178) were introduced in 2016, but did not proceed past second reading. The Environmental Bill of Rights proposed today builds on these earlier efforts. In the belief that the right to a healthy environment transcends party lines, the ERWG encourages all Nova Scotians to call their provincial representatives and express their support for the Bill.

For more information go to www.ecelaw.ca/news/er.html or contact:

Lisa Mitchell, Executive Director, ECELAW
902-670-1113 lisa@ecelaw.ca

Ingrid Waldron, Director, ENRICH Project
902-494-4267 iwaldron@dal.ca

Mark Butler, Policy Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre
[902-266-5401](tel:902-266-5401) action@ecologyaction.ca

Members of the NS Environmental Rights Working Group

- Lisa Mitchell, Executive Director, East Coast Environmental Law
- Mark Butler, Policy Director, Ecology Action Centre
- Lil McPherson, Food Activist and Owner of the Wooden Monkey
- Gretchen Fitzgerald, National Programs, Sierra Club of Canada Foundation
- Silver Donald Cameron, Journalist, Green Interview
- Tricia Barry, Board of Directors, Ecojustice
- Jamie Simpson, Lawyer, Juniper Law
- Heather Johannesen, Nova Scotia Environmental Network
- Ingrid Waldron, Director, ENRICH
- Vinidhra Vaitheeswaran, Board of Directors, ECELAW
- Sadie Beaton, Ecology Action Centre
- Matthew Green, Director, NSPIRG
- Ellen Sweeney, Health Research Scientist, Atlantic PATH
- Jenna Khoury-Hanna, student, Schulich School of Law
- Taylor Smiley, student Schulich School of Law
- Mike Kofahl, student, Schulich School of Law
- Neil Robertson, student, Schulich School of Law