

Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities

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Marilyn Merritt-Gray, Chair

Via email

December 6, 2023,

Annika Chiasson
Executive Director
NB Environmental Network
232 Botsford St., 2nd Floor
Moncton, NB. E1C 4X7

The NB Environmental Rights Caucus:

Marg Milburn, Chair, The Climate Reality Project
Sam Arnold, Sustainable Energy Group, Carleton County
Bonnie Hamilton Bogart, Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities
Gordon Dalzell, Citizens Coalition for Clean Air
Denise Melanson, Council of Canadians, Kent County
Saadia Hara, NBEN Coordinator

Dear Ms. Chiasson and the NB Environmental Rights Caucus:

Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities (Voices) is a NB non-profit community group of environmentally dedicated individuals from the Lower Wolastoq/St. John River Region. Voices was formed in 2014, with a Mission to educate, create public awareness, propose solutions, and inspire action that respects and revitalizes our sources of life: land, air, water and food, and our communities.

Voices endorses the work of the NBEN Environmental Rights Caucus and we will do everything within our power to champion the proposed Environmental Bill of Rights into legislation. Voices' mission aligns closely with the goals of the proposed Bill. We have been happy to provide input and support the Caucus and their work since 2018 while they re-worked the proposed Bill.

We recognize that the health of our physical environment directly affects our personal health, wellbeing and mortality. Contaminated water, poor air quality, living environments rife with mold and disease-triggering contaminants, the dramatic decline of essential pollinators, the neglect and destruction of critical wetlands, the erosion of our biodiverse forest habitats, as well as our shorelines and prime agricultural land – we have experienced all of these risks locally.

The primary focus of Voices’ work is within the lower Wolastoq/St.John River floodplain region; as such we are very aware of our neighbours and our own vulnerability should climate change and the climate crisis remain unchecked. Severe overland and freshet flooding, along with drought and wild fires have all recently and seriously affected our rural region. We are very aware that our environment is rapidly changing and that environmental concerns require heightened and at times urgent priority when decisions are being made within government and at a community level. An Environmental Bill of Rights would be instrumental in raising the profile of these pressing issues and provide a helpful values and science-based standard when communities face these political and practical decisions.

The proposed Bill is comprehensive, it reflects impressive rigor and careful attention to detail. We as a community group were particularly heartened that the health of our children was placed at the heart of the Bill, giving the health of children the primary focus and intended outcome. We are keenly aware of the fact that infant and children’s health is significantly more vulnerable and at-risk, when exposed to compromised environmental conditions.

We applaud the work of the NBEN Environmental Rights Caucus and endorse their proposed “Act Respecting the Right to a Healthy Environment”. On November 16, 2023 Voices members voted unanimously to send a letter to the NB Environmental Network / Environmental Rights Caucus expressing our strong support of the made-in-New Brunswick Bill.

With respect and solidarity,

Marilyn Merritt-Gray
Chair, Voices for Sustainable Environments and Communities