



Please reply to: c/o West Coast Environmental Law, #700 – 509 Richards Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z6

August 12, 2021

Premier John Horgan  
 Government of British Columbia  
 PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt  
 Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Cc: Minister George Heyman (by email only at [ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca))

Cc: Minister Katrine Conroy (by email only at [FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca))

**\*\*\* BY EMAIL AT [PREMIER@GOV.BC.CA](mailto:PREMIER@GOV.BC.CA) AND MAIL \*\*\***

Cc: Minister Bruce Ralston (by email only at [EMPR.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:EMPR.Minister@gov.bc.ca))

Dear Premier Horgan:

**Re: Protect BC from Climate Change**

Climate change is here. British Columbians need a government that will keep them safe from rising global temperatures and related impacts. This summer’s heat wave and the wildfires in 2017, 2018 and again in 2021 – and their devastating consequences – demonstrate this clearly.

We are already behind the curve in BC. Your government has just now put forward a draft Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy (CPAS).<sup>1</sup> The CPAS is disappointing and does not get us on track. Together with previous delays and unfulfilled commitments, it suggests that your government does not recognize the serious threats the climate crisis poses to the safety and livelihoods of British Columbians.

<sup>1</sup> <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/568/2021/06/Climate-Preparedness-and-Adaptation-Strategy-2021.pdf>.

## **Climate change is killing, injuring, displacing and harming British Columbians**

Scientists have explained that this year's heat dome was virtually impossible without climate change; it was 150 times more likely and 2°C warmer.<sup>2</sup> The 2017 wildfires were between seven and eleven times larger than they would have been in a world without climate change.<sup>3</sup> In BC, just this summer our continued reliance on the global fossil fuel economy killed 569 British Columbians (from the heat dome alone, not counting deaths from wildfire smoke),<sup>4</sup> displaced thousands and caused tens of millions of dollars in damage to property and economic loss.

Yet we have not seen a corresponding level of urgency in action from your government.

We desperately need more action from your government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our contribution to the global climate crisis, and to keep temperature increases to a manageable level.

But we also need you to recognize the support our communities need in order to adapt to climate impacts. When wildfires or heat waves occur, we need strategies that work with Indigenous and settler communities that are dealing with these climate impacts on the ground. Instead, precious time has been lost because the province ignored Indigenous communities' offers of their expertise and traditional knowledge of fire behaviour in their territories. We have not seen urgency from your government in ensuring that our communities are prepared for climate change.

### **A chronology of inaction on preparing for climate change**

BC launched its first Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2010. However, in 2018 – one year after you were first elected – the Auditor General found that the strategy was out of date, lacked specific information on priorities and the necessary deliverables, resource requirements and timelines. In 2019, your government's CleanBC climate plan promised that "By 2020, the Province will develop an Adaptation Strategy based on a province-wide climate risk assessment."

A "Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment" was released in 2019, identifying the risks of "provincial level events" associated with climate change. As the name suggests, the preliminary assessment was not comprehensive, and expressly recommended further work to assess the adequacy of climate adaptation measures, as well as further evaluation of risks.

The Province did not deliver on its promise of an adaptation strategy by 2020, nor has any further climate risk assessment been released.

Phase I of the CPAS (covering 2021-22), as well as proposed actions for Phase II (2022-2025), was unveiled on June 9, 2021. The one-and-a-half year delay would be disappointing but palatable if the plan had the level of detail recommended by the Auditor General in 2018. Instead, the CPAS actions are

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-north-american-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/>.

<sup>3</sup> M. C. Kirchmeier-Young, N. P. Gillett, F. W. Zwiers, A. J. Cannon, F. S. Anslow. "Attribution of the Influence of Human-Induced Climate Change on an Extreme Fire Season". Vol 7, Issue 1, Earth's Future (Jan 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2018EF001050>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/news/2021/chief\\_coroner\\_statement\\_-\\_heat\\_related\\_deaths.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/news/2021/chief_coroner_statement_-_heat_related_deaths.pdf).

peppered with vague terms such as “explore,” “which could include,” and “improve and promote.” It still does not provide the deliverables, roles, timelines, resource requirements and other details that the Auditor General identified as missing from the 2010 Strategy – and that citizens expect in 2021, when we have had years to grapple with the impacts of the climate crisis. These are the elements needed to get us on track, and they are missing.

BC needs an approach to climate change that will enable us to be resilient, over the short, medium and long term. We need a coordinated approach that identifies the largest threats to British Columbian communities and ecosystems, and provides a concerted plan to address those threats in the most effective and fully resourced way. We need a strategy that provides concrete support and coordination to the many communities across BC, Indigenous and otherwise, that are already taking concrete steps to address current and future climate impacts.

The CPAS points to \$90 million in existing programs associated with adaptation in the *Stronger BC Plan* (about 6% of the spending in that plan). However, in 2017 the Province spent \$649 million fighting fires – after consistently neglecting proactive fire strategies aligned with Indigenous expertise – and already this year has spent more than \$206 million as of late July.<sup>5</sup> We do not have figures for the government costs associated with the heat dome.

Different studies have estimated that each dollar spent on climate adaptation and preparedness can reduce or avoid disaster costs by six<sup>6</sup> to 60<sup>7</sup> dollars. A strong climate adaptation strategy – one the BC Government is committed to following – can help ensure that such money is spent where it will be most effective. Our current reactive costs indicate we need a larger, and smarter investment in preparedness.

### **Let’s get BC on track**

Your government, and not only the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, must start treating the climate crisis with the seriousness it deserves.

This requires action to rapidly reduce BC’s greenhouse gas emissions (we note that the Clean BC commitment to a road map for 2030 by the end of 2020 was also missed), but it also requires an adaptation plan to keep our ecosystems and communities safe, beginning by identifying and prioritizing those risks that are largest and/or those adaptation measures which will have the most significant benefits, and developing integrated, holistic, funded responses across sectors.

In the context of wildfires, your government has stated: “The B.C. government will always spend whatever is necessary to protect people and property.”<sup>8</sup> Once you recognize that climate change is the crisis, then protecting people and property requires you to move equally aggressively to create and implement a forward-looking climate adaptation strategy that ensures we are evaluating and managing

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<sup>5</sup> <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/cost-of-fighting-b-c-forest-fires-already-higher-than-all-over-last-summer-with-206-million-spent-so-far>.

<sup>6</sup> Insurance Bureau of Canada and Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The Cost of Climate Adaptation at the Local Level. February 2020, available at <http://assets.ibc.ca/Documents/Disaster/The-Cost-of-Climate-Adaptation-Report-EN.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/13\\_Why\\_it\\_Matters\\_Climate\\_Action\\_letter\\_size\\_1p.pdf](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/13_Why_it_Matters_Climate_Action_letter_size_1p.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Above, note 4.

risks as effectively as possible. Such a plan needs to work closely and respectfully with the many Indigenous and local governments that are already taking steps to protect their communities.

It is reprehensible that 11 years after BC's first Climate Adaptation Strategy, four years after the 2017 wildfires prompted massive evacuations and loss of property, three years after the Auditor General's report, a year and a half after promising an Adaptation Strategy in Clean BC, and just after 570 deaths due to climate-induced heat, that BC has not produced a climate adaptation strategy that offers a clear plan and direction to address the risks that threaten the Province. More is needed.

Sincerely,

Andrew Larigakis, 350Vancouver

Larry Barzelai, BC-Canadian Association of Physicians  
for the Environment (BC-CAPE)

Judy O'Leary, BC Climate Alliance

Roger Bryenton, BC Hydro Ratepayers Ass'n

Harry Crosby, BC Nature

Elan Gibson, Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder-  
Morgan Expansion (BROKE)

Sue Cairns, Citizens' Climate Lobby - East Kootenay

Laura Sacks, Citizens' Climate Lobby - Nelson-West  
Kootenay

Michael D. Sawyer, Citizen's Oil & Gas Council

Seth Klein, Climate Emergency Unit

Richard Hagensen, Council of Canadians – (Campbell  
River)

Steering Committee, Council of Canadians (Comox  
Valley)

Meghan Reiser, Cranbrook Climate Hub

Lisa Pierce, Denman Island Climate Action Network

Kim Trainor, Douglas College Faculty Association  
Climate Emergency Action Committee

Linda Thyer, Doctors for Planetary Health - West Coast

Brian Short, Environmental Justice Task Force, First  
Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo

Eleanor Calder, Esquimalt Climate Organizers

Zsuzsa Harsman, Esquimalt United Church (Justice  
Team)

Eoin Finn, Force of Nature - North Shore Community  
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Christianne Wilhelmson, Georgia Strait Alliance

Julie Johnston, GreenHeart Education

Elaine Klimke, Mount Work Coalition

Tracey Saxby, My Sea to Sky

Heather Baitz, Nanaimo Climate Action Hub

Julia M. Roberts, Nanaimo Green Faith

Andrea Careless, Oak Bay Climate Force

Erin Renwick, Parents4Climate

Gertie Jocksch, Programs in Earth Literacies

Ana Simeon, Respecting Aboriginal Values and  
Environmental Needs (RAVEN)

Salome Waters, Saanich Eco Advocates

Jane Devonshire, South Island Climate Action Network  
(SI-CAN)

Julia Lissau, Sustainable Environmental Network  
Society

Julien Langlois, Transition Kamloops Network

Cathie Blanchard, View Royal Climate Coalition (VRCC)

Delores Broten, Watershed Sentinel

Andrew Gage, West Coast Environmental Law  
Association

Robyn Duncan, Wildsight

Guy Dauncey, Yellow Point Ecological Society