

Long-awaited environmental protection bill one step closer to becoming law

Groups welcome Senate committee amendments to protect the right to a healthy environment and close loopholes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 9, 2022

OTTAWA/TRADITIONAL, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE ALGONQUIN ANISHNAABEG PEOPLE -

Earlier today, long-awaited legislation to modernize the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA), cleared its first major hurdle in the Senate. The Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources completed its review of the bill, and voted to strengthen it before returning it to the full Senate.

Bill S-5 modernizes CEPA, Canada's cornerstone environmental law that is supposed to keep people across Canada safe from toxic pollution and dangerous substances.

This law has not been updated in over two decades and needs to be modernized to better protect people's health and the environment in light of today's pollution challenges.

In February 2022, the government tabled Bill S-5 in the Senate to finally update Canada's regime for assessing and managing toxic substances and recognize the human right to a healthy environment for the first time in federal law. While this legislation was welcomed as an important step forward, it was clear that Bill S-5 needed to be strengthened in Parliament.

The Senate Standing Committee made crucial amendments to Bill S-5. In particular, the groups applaud efforts by Senators Rosa Galvez, Mary Jane McCallum, Julie Miville-Dechêne, and Stan Kutcher for their success in advancing amendments to strengthen provisions dealing with the right to a healthy environment and regulating chemicals of highest concern.

Regrettably, the committee rejected, or did not pursue, some proposed amendments that would have further strengthened key provisions. For example, the Senate committee did not address the need to improve transparency and ensure faster action on toxics. These matters should be addressed when the bill reaches the House of Commons.

Several members of the committee, including Senators McCallum and Arnot crucially spoke about the importance of upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian law, as related to preventing pollution impacts on human health and the environment. The Senators identified how gaps in CEPA impact Indigenous peoples and lands

Bill S-5 will now return to the full Senate for further debate and a final vote. As the bill was introduced in the Senate, a "yea" vote would refer it to the House of Commons. Both the Senate and the House must approve a bill before it can become law. Environmental and health groups call on Senators to pass Bill S-5 and ensure that it reaches the House of Commons by the summer recess, where it should be further strengthened.

Background

[Joint submission](#) on Bill S-5

Dr. Elaine MacDonald, Ecojustice Healthy Communities Program Director, said:

“Bill S-5 reporting out of the Senate committee is an important milestone in modernizing CEPA, a law that has not been reformed in over two decades.

“While more needs to be done to strengthen and improve Bill S-5, the Senate committee made more crucial amendments so that the legislation can provide better protect the health and wellbeing of everyone in Canada.”

Cassie Barker, Senior Toxics Program Manager, Environmental Defence:

“We are pleased that Senate has prioritized several key improvements to Bill S-5, and we hope to see further improvements to CEPA in the House this fall. The stronger this bill becomes, the better we can tackle our most pressing pollution problems”

Jennifer Beeman, Executive Director, Breast Cancer Action Quebec said:

“This bill is so long overdue, we are pleased to see it moving forward in a strengthened form thanks to the work of the Senate Committee. More needs to be done, but we are closer to our goal of stronger toxics regulations and the right to a healthy environment for Canada that will finally bring us nearer to what the most advanced countries are doing.”

Lisa Gue, David Suzuki Foundation National Policy Manager said:

“With today’s Senate committee vote, Canada is one step closer to finally recognizing the human right to a healthy environment, as most other countries already do. A crucial amendment approved by the committee improves accountability by establishing a clear duty for the environment minister to protect this right, subject to reasonable limits. But the requirements in the bill for implementing this right still need to be strengthened. We need Parliamentarians in both the Senate and the House to work quickly to further improve and pass this important update to Canada’s environmental protection law.”

Dr. Jane McArthur, CAPE Toxics Program Director said:

“Strengthening of the right to a healthy environment and other amendments to Bill S-5 approved by the Senate ENEV Committee are key to getting to a place where human and planetary health are prioritized and better protected under law in Canada. We celebrate these steps forward and are eager to see further improvements to CEPA in the House - our health depends on it.”

About:

Ecojustice uses the power of the law to defend nature, combat climate change and fight for a healthy environment. Its strategic, public interest lawsuits and advocacy lead to precedent-setting court decisions and law and policy that deliver lasting solutions to Canada’s most urgent environmental problems. As Canada’s largest environmental law charity, Ecojustice operates offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa and Halifax.

Environmental Defence is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization that works with government, industry and individuals to defend clean water, a safe climate and healthy communities.

Breast Cancer Action Quebec is a feminist, environmental health organization whose mission is the prevention of breast cancer, with a particular focus on environmental factors linked to the disease. Working in collaboration with a wide range of groups, BCAQ educates on toxics and other health issues and works for a clean environment and communities that support the health of their members.

The **David Suzuki Foundation** (DavidSuzuki.org | [@DavidSuzukiFdn](https://www.instagram.com/DavidSuzukiFdn)) is a leading Canadian environmental non-profit organization, founded in 1990. We operate in English and French, with offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. We collaborate with all people in Canada, including First Nations leadership and communities, governments, businesses and individuals to find solutions to create a sustainable Canada through scientific research, traditional ecological knowledge, communications and public engagement, and innovative policy and legal solutions. Our mission is to protect nature's diversity and the well-being of all life, now and for the future. We envision a day where we all act on the understanding that we are one with nature.

The **Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment** (CAPE) is a physician-directed non-profit organization working to secure human health by protecting the planet. Since its founding in 1993, CAPE's work has achieved substantial policy victories in collaboration with many partners in the environmental and health movements. From coast to coast to coast, the organization operates throughout the country with regional committees active in most provinces and all territories.

For media inquiries:

Brendan Glauser, bglaiser@davidsuzuki.org, 604-356-8829

Sean O'Shea, soshea@ecojustice.ca, 416-368-7533 ext. 523

Paula Gray, pgray@environmentaldefence.ca, 705-435-8611

Viorica Lorcencova, viorica.lorcencova@acsqc.ca, 514-443-8437

Pamela Daoust, pamela@cape.ca, 647-930-0236