



THE PREMIER
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA
B3J 2T3

September 21, 2017

Honourable Iain Rankin
Minister of Environment

Dear Minister Rankin:

As we start our second term as government, we have an opportunity to work with all Nova Scotians to continue to build a stronger province. To achieve collective impact, we must remain focused on our common objectives and work alongside those we represent. We are all stronger when we work together.

In our first four years, we made decisions that were difficult, but necessary, for the future of the province. We are now in a position to continue our work to build a stronger Nova Scotia. The Report on the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy outlined economic and demographic challenges for our province, and the One Nova Scotia Coalition set out a route forward in We Choose Now. While we collectively still have work to do, I am proud of our progress and success over the past four years.

Immigration continues to be a top priority for our government. Our population has hit an all-time high as a result of our efforts and the welcoming attitude of Nova Scotians. We have experienced a record setting increase in immigration. In 2016, we welcomed 5,483 newcomers, the highest number of arrivals since the end of the Second World War. Between 2014 and 2016, Nova Scotia's youth unemployment rate declined more than anywhere else in the country, meaning that a greater share of young people looking for work found it.

We have continued to work together to grow our economy and create a thriving province. This work is reaping unprecedented rewards. Last year our seafood exports almost doubled to \$1.8 billion and our agriculture and fishery sectors are experiencing extraordinary growth. We have worked to strategically target markets in China, the United Kingdom, and the United States where our quality Nova Scotian products are in high demand. Recently Nova Scotia Business Inc. (NSBI) took the first step in creating a business export program to help local companies access strategic northeastern United States markets, drive export growth in the private sector, and create more job opportunities for Nova Scotians. Our success has not been limited to exports. Last year Nova Scotia's tourism industry had its best year in history and its third consecutive year of growth. Approximately 2.2 million visitors came to Nova Scotia last year, an increase of eight per cent over 2015.

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Importantly, we achieved these major milestones while tabling successive balanced budgets. For the first time in a decade we have a sustainable fiscal plan which provides the fiscal room needed to make social progress and ensure economic growth and benefits for all Nova Scotians. Embarking on our second term, with new members of Executive Council and refreshed Ministerial responsibilities, we will build on our momentum. In the next four years, we will work with Nova Scotians to build a stronger province where the benefits of measurably improved social well-being, population, and economic growth achieved through coordinated action, discipline and fiscal sustainability are felt across the entire province.

We will remain steadfast in our commitment to work collaboratively and inclusively with Nova Scotians and, where appropriate, with partners across Atlantic Canada, as we resolve the challenging issues that face us. We will ensure Nova Scotia's infrastructure supports safe and connected communities. We will continue our efforts to build an effective integrated health care system focused on timely and fair access to primary care, stronger continuing care, and expanded mental health services. We will give children a head start in their early years, the right classroom supports at school, and access to advanced education – all essential to ensuring a bright future for the next generation.

Propelled by strong export growth, expansion of our strategic sectors, and collaboration and innovation, we will grow the economy and ensure all Nova Scotians feel part of our success.

The Department of Environment has acted to improve compliance with environmental standards, achieving results while realizing service efficiencies and reducing regulatory burden. An example of this success is the department's review of the watercourse alteration program and the subsequent goals that were achieved. Many program approvals have been replaced by a notification process that has effectively removed unnecessary paperwork for both businesses and the department. This approach gives department staff more time to conduct inspections and audits.

In 2015, the department reached its land protection goal of 12 percent under the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, and in this past fiscal year, added to the province's list of legally protected areas. To date, 12.39 percent of Nova Scotia's lands are protected. As Minister of Environment I ask that you work with the Department of Natural Resources to move towards 13 percent protected land across the province while ensuring a balance so there are no negative recreational or economic effects.

I ask that the department continue to support a business environment which is conducive to innovation and economic development, striking the right balance, ensuring that effective regulation protects the interests of Nova Scotians while enhancing our provincial prosperity.

Nova Scotian coastlines are a key natural asset. They captivate visitors, prove a livelihood for our fishing communities, as well a crucial environment for local wildlife. In your work as Minister of Environment, I ask that you commence the work needed to begin consultations with Nova Scotians to inform the development of a coastal protection act which will provide legal protection for our coasts. I ask that you collaborate with the Department of Natural Resources to support their work on the Biodiversity Act and the creation of a Biodiversity Council.

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As Minister of Environment you will also pass legislation to implement a Cap and Trade system, using a made-in-Nova Scotia approach to cutting greenhouse gas emissions in the province, in fulfillment of our landmark agreement-in-principle on climate change with the federal government.

Please find below a list of platform commitments assigned to your department:

- Pass legislation providing legal protection for our coasts
- Pass legislation to implement a Nova Scotia Cap and Trade System
- Continue to enforce the moratorium on fracking for onshore natural gas

I will be requesting regular feedback and progress reports on the status of our government priorities.

I encourage you to maintain your focus on our key priority areas mentioned above, as well as on our stated platform commitments. As members of the Executive Council, we all have distinct responsibilities as well as shared priorities. Collaboration and coordination within government and with stakeholders will be fundamental to delivering our objectives. For example, SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population is an excellent example of collaboration across government and with many other individuals, groups, and institutions to support older adults to stay connected with, and involved in, the social, economic, and cultural aspects of our province. Within government, data sharing across departments and collaborative digital service delivery are integral to providing high quality coordinated services to Nova Scotians.

We believe in an open, transparent and accountable government that engages citizens. We will work together with Nova Scotians to build a stronger province where everyone experiences enhanced social well-being, and we achieve population and economic growth through coordinated action, discipline, and fiscal sustainability.

Our province is in a stronger position now than it was four years ago, and I know that we are ready to do more great things together. We will build on our hard work over the last four years so all Nova Scotians share in the success of our province. We will advance our agenda using a coordinated, disciplined approach so that more youth will make Nova Scotia their home, more newcomers will be welcomed, and better opportunities are available for children and families. We will build an economy that supports new investments and celebrates innovation.

It is my privilege to lead our efforts as your Premier and I look forward to working with you to build a stronger Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. McNeil', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Honourable Stephen McNeil, M.L.A.
Premier of Nova Scotia

Copy to: Frances Martin, Deputy Minister of Environment