

Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
September 3-4-5, 2025, Winnipeg, MB

Resolution no. 25/2025

TITLE: Investing in First Nations Freshwater Stewardship

SUBJECT: Water, Environment

MOVED BY: Chief Tony Traverse, Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation, MB

SECONDED BY: Chief Hartley Everett, Berens River First Nation, MB

DECISION Approved by the AFN Executive Committee by consensus

WHEREAS:

A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:

- i. Article 25: Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relations with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters, and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.
- ii. Article 29(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection without discrimination.
- iii. Article 32(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.
- iv. Article 32(2): States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

B. Freshwater ecosystems across Turtle Island are at risk, with freshwater quality, quantity, and biodiversity cumulatively impacted by environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change.

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- C. Management of freshwater across Canada exists in a complex landscape of jurisdiction that requires collaboration amongst federal, provincial, territorial governments, binational organizations, Indigenous Peoples, as well as non-governmental and private sector organizations.
- D. First Nations are on the front lines of these challenges, facing compounding impacts on water quality from harmful algal blooms, contamination, and resource development.
- E. In addition to growing water security concerns from the privatization of water, impacts to water levels from industrial use—exacerbated by climate change—have immense impacts on transportation and supply routes, especially for Northern and remote First Nations.
- F. Additionally, industrial water use for power generation has resulted in impacts to freshwater ecosystem health and important fish habitat, including the loss of connectivity for the migration of culturally important fish species, with negative consequences for subsistence fisheries.
- G. Water is sacred to First Nations and foundational to our health, well-being, cultural continuity, and ways of life. Ongoing water insecurity and declining health of our freshwater ecosystems directly threaten our Inherent rights and responsibilities.
- H. First Nations are leading innovative and effective watershed governance and stewardship initiatives, including First Nations water gatherings, watershed assessment and planning, developing water strategies, ecosystem restoration, and Indigenous science-based monitoring.
- I. Investing in First Nations-led watershed stewardship is an act of nation-building, enabling First Nations to exercise their jurisdiction, fulfil responsibilities to the Land and Water, and to contribute meaningfully to Canada's climate resilience, biodiversity goals, and sustainable economy.
- J. Collaboration amongst First Nations will also be a critical part of the solution. For example, First Nations around Lake Winnipeg are working together to set environmental restoration objectives and have called for First Nations in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed, spanning across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, to assert their rights to stewardship.
- K. Recent Government of Canada initiatives, such as establishing a Canada Water Agency, commitments to modernize the *Canada Water Act*, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) Ecologically Significant Areas (ESAs) policy present timely opportunities for long-term, collaborative investments in First Nations-led water governance and stewardship, consistent with reconciliation and the vision for a net-zero, nature-positive future.
- L. The First Nations-in-Assembly have passed resolutions directing the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to support First Nations on water stewardship, including Resolution 53/2023, *First Nations-led Process for National Water Stewardship and the Canada Water Agency*, and Resolution 43/2021, *Support for First Nations Inherent Rights, Title and Jurisdiction related to Water Stewardship, including the Traditional Roles of First Nations Women*.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

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1. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to call on federal, provincial, and territorial governments to support and invest in First Nations-led water stewardship, including watershed planning, assessment, monitoring, and restoration, through long-term, flexible, and sustainable funding models.
2. Direct the AFN, guided by the relevant technical and Chiefs' committees, to identify and leverage federal, provincial, and territorial government policy and legislative tools, including the Ecologically Significant Areas policy, the *Canada Water Act*, and mechanisms under the Canada Water Agency, to support First Nations in water stewardship and governance.

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