

# Freshwater Policy

## ***Suggested citation:***

*Smith, R. and Chapariha, M. (2021). Freshwater Policy. Our Living Waters*

## 1. Introduction

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) seeks to ensure access to safe water sources and sanitation for all, with Target 6.4 specifically emphasizing the importance of protecting freshwater by “substantially increase[ing] water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure[ing] sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity” by 2030. Moreover, the United Nations has committed to focus on water for the Water Action Decade (2018 to 2028).<sup>1</sup> Its aim is to raise awareness and advance the water agenda. Many countries, including Canada, have committed to focus on water during this decade<sup>2</sup>.

This impact measure serves to assess the degree to which Canadian governments have up-to-date water policies and laws. It is important that freshwater policies be kept current, as such policies set out the vision, direction and measures governments use to achieve the targets of SDG 6, the goals of the Water Action Decade and other freshwater objectives.

## 2. Methodology

This impact measure is an update of the previous version published in 2019. It expands upon that version by considering not just whether governments have current freshwater policies but also whether they have freshwater laws that are up to date. In some cases, governments have water policies that are not current (i.e., older than 10 years) but laws that are. This expansion of what is considered in the impact measure reflects the fact that it is not just policies that determine a government’s commitment to freshwater sustainability but also the related laws it puts in place.

To compile the impact measure, desk-based analysis of freshwater policies and related laws in the federal, provincial, and territorial governments was undertaken. A policy was considered

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://wateractiondecade.org/>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://wateractiondecade.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CanadaStatement.pdf>

current if it was set out less than 10 years ago (i.e., in 2011 or more recently). A law was considered current if it was enacted or underwent a major amendment less than 10 years ago.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. General findings

Of the 14 federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada, seven have a freshwater policy and/or law that is less than 10 years old. Only one government has both a current policy and law: Quebec. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories all have either a current policy or a current law, but not both. The remaining seven governments, including the federal government, have neither a current policy nor a current law (Table 1). The federal government has the oldest policy and law, dating from 1987 and 1985 respectively. One government, Saskatchewan, has no specific law pertaining to freshwater (though it does have a current policy). Three governments (Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut) have no specific freshwater policy; none of them has a current freshwater law.

#### 3.2. Comparison with previous findings

Direct comparison with the previous version of this impact measure is possible only for freshwater policies, since consideration of freshwater laws was added only for this update. In the period since 2019, one government (Northwest Territories) that had a current freshwater policy has fallen off the list, since its policy was set out in 2010 and is now more than 10 years old. No government has set out a new freshwater policy in the period since 2019.

*Table 1 – Status of freshwater policies and laws in Canadian federal/provincial/territorial governments, November 2021*

Jurisdiction	Name and date of freshwater policy	Current freshwater policy?	Name and date of freshwater law enactment or last major amendment	Current freshwater law?
Canada	<a href="#">Federal water policy</a> , 1987	No	<a href="#">Canada Water Act</a> , 1985	No
British Columbia	<a href="#">Living Water Smart</a> , 2008	No	<a href="#">Water Sustainability Act</a> , 2014	Yes
Alberta	<a href="#">Water for Life: A Renewal</a> , 2008	No	<a href="#">Water Act</a> , 2000	No

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<sup>3</sup> A major amendment is one that changes the scope of application, the intent or the penalties associated with the law. Minor amendments to ensure that laws remain current with other laws (e.g., by changing terms or definitions) were not considered.

<b>Saskatchewan</b>	<a href="#">25 Year Water Security Plan, 2012</a>	Yes	No specific freshwater law	No
<b>Manitoba</b>	<a href="#">The Manitoba Water Strategy, 2003</a>	No	<a href="#">The Water Protection Act, 2005</a>	No
<b>Ontario</b>	No specific freshwater policy	No	<a href="#">Clean Water Act, 2006</a>	No
<b>Quebec</b>	<a href="#">Québec Water Strategy 2018-2030, 2018</a>	Yes	<a href="#">An Act respecting the conservation of wetlands and bodies of water, 2017</a>	Yes
<b>New Brunswick</b>	<a href="#">A Water Strategy for New Brunswick 2018 - 2028, 2017</a>	Yes	<a href="#">Clean Water Act, 1989</a>	No
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	<a href="#">Water Resources Management Strategy, 2010</a>	No	<a href="#">Water Resources Protection Act, 2000</a>	No
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	<a href="#">Watershed Strategy, 2015</a>	Yes	<a href="#">Water Act, 1988</a>	No
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>	No specific freshwater policy	No	<a href="#">Water Resources Act, 2002</a>	No
<b>Yukon</b>	<a href="#">Water for Nature, Water for People: Yukon Water Strategy and Action Plan, 2014</a>	Yes	<a href="#">Waters Act, 2003</a>	No
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	<a href="#">Northern Voices, Northern Waters NWT Water Stewardship Strategy, 2010</a>	No	<a href="#">Waters Act, 2014</a>	Yes
<b>Nunavut</b>	No specific freshwater policy	No	<a href="#">Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, 2002</a>	No

Source: Our Living Waters