

Mr. Robert Varney
Chair, Joint Public Advisory Committee
Commission for Environmental Cooperation
700 Rue de la Gauchetière Ouest Suite 1620
Montréal QC H3B 5M2

Re: Advice to Council 19-03

Dear Mr. Varney,

On behalf of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Council, I would like to thank the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) for its advice to Council 19-03 titled *JPAC Expert Forum on Community-based Approaches to Disaster Resilience*. I understand that this advice is the product of the JPAC's expert forum on community resilience, held on October 24-25, 2019 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I would also like to thank the JPAC for its patience as the Council has considered this advice.

Whether it is wildfires, droughts, floods, or extreme heat, communities in North America are experiencing the effects of these climate events first hand. The Council recognizes the challenges communities face in responding to extreme weather events and has invested in improving communities' capacities to respond to such events. In the 2019-2020 Operational Plan, for example, the Council allocated CAD \$1.5 million to support the implementation of four projects related to improving North America's preparedness to extreme events. An additional CAD \$1.5 million was granted to communities through the *North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action Program* to support innovative projects across the continent that improve the capacity of local communities as they adapt to extreme events and which have the potential to be replicated. The Council looks forward to building on these initiatives in collaboration with the North American public.

The Council would further like to acknowledge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the CEC's operations which could result in the postponement of activities or delays in the implementation of cooperative projects. The Council thanks the JPAC for leading by example and moving the in-person public forum on the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and the most recent JPAC meeting on the margins of the 2020 CEC Council Session to virtual means. Furthermore, we appreciate the JPAC's support and patience as our countries work to ensure the collective health and safety of our communities.

In response to your first recommendation, recognizing the success of the last JPAC public forum in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in October 2019, the Council would be pleased to consider how to integrate elements of the JPAC public meeting formula into the upcoming Council public sessions as conditions allow. In particular, the Council recognizes the value of matching the issues to be addressed with a place that has relevant experience, and the importance of featuring and integrating wisdom and experiences of Indigenous and local communities. The Council also acknowledges the merit of dividing the meeting into two parts in order to include site visits that showcase the real-world examples of the issues people are facing and looks forward to considering possibilities for the application of this model on a case-by-case basis.

In response to your second recommendation, the Council notes the allocation of nearly CAD \$300,000 through the *North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action* (NAPECA) program to two community-based renewable energy projects in Canada and the United States. As a

result, in Alberta, Canada, five communities will be better equipped to identify climate hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities; be capable of evaluating and deploying adaptation measures; and, know where to target investments to enhance asset management, and reduce infrastructure vulnerability. In Puerto Rico, two communities will be connected to a solar energy system that will provide a clean source of power and improve resilience in the face of natural disasters. In Mexico, the NAPECA program is supporting four communities in their efforts to reduce their vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events with nearly CAD \$500,000 in grants this year. The Council is confident that these initiatives will have a positive effect on improving energy security in these communities, and we look forward to pursuing an exchange of experiences on community-based energy projects through the CEC as well as continuing to consider the use of our grant programs as a mechanism to allocate funding directly to communities.

In response to recommendation three, the Council recognizes the value of public-private partnerships in supporting communities in their recovery from natural disasters, and looks forward to continuing to work directly with communities to support climate change adaptation. The Council further recognizes the role of insurance companies in supporting communities through these challenges. However, given the multijurisdictional nature of the insurance industry across the three countries, at this time the Council would not support the establishment of a new working group to address this topic.

In response to recommendation four on the initiation of a special investigation to understand the relationship between cultural resilience and community-based disaster preparedness we would encourage the JPAC to confer with the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group and consider ways which such an investigation could be addressed in the upcoming operational plan, which the Council will be discussing in the coming months.

Once again, the Council would like to thank you for these timely recommendations. They will be helpful as we advance with the implementation of the CEC's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, and as we endeavour to develop a new operational plan that addresses the concerns of the North American public and is ambitious in its objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Catherine Stewart
Alternate Representative of Canada

cc. Mr. Chad McIntosh, Alternate Representative of the United States of America
Dr. Rodolfo Godínez Rosales, Alternate Representative of the United States of Mexico
Mr. Richard Morgan, CEC Executive Director
Ms. Marcela Orozco, JPAC Liaison Officer