



## briefing note

### The Right to a Healthy Environment

The inextricable link between environmental health and human health is now widely recognized and most Canadians understand that the environment is a key factor in sustaining healthy communities. Environmental rights support many issues Canadians care about – healthy food, sustainable land use and development, water and air quality, climate change, habitat and biodiversity protection, parks creation, children’s access to nature, social justice and more.

The David Suzuki Foundation has completed its Blue Dot Tour of Canada to promote the Right to a Healthy Environment. Its goal is to enshrine this right in the Canadian Constitution through a staged strategy:

**Neighbours come together to change a community.** A growing movement of Canadians calls upon their local governments to pass declarations respecting people’s right to live in a healthy environment.

**Local governments come together to change a province.** Community by community, this movement will inspire decision-makers across our provinces and territories to take notice. With so many communities calling for action from all levels of government, the next step is to have our provinces follow suit and pass environmental bills of rights.

**Provinces come together to change a nation.** When 7 out of 10 provinces and 2 out of 3 territories, representing more than 50 per cent of the Canadian population have recognized our right to a healthy environment we turn toward the ultimate goal: amending the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Canada recognizes your right to a healthy environment.** Recognition in the Charter is the final step in protecting the right to clean air, fresh water and healthy food for all Canadians.

More than 110 nations around the world and several provinces, territories and communities in Canada, have already recognized their citizens’ right to live in a healthy environment through bylaws, declarations, legislation, charters and constitutional provisions. Yet Canada still lacks important legal protection for environmental rights. The World Health Organization estimates environmental contamination, including polluted air and water, causes as many as 36,000 premature deaths annually in Canada. Preventable environmental hazards contribute up to 1.5 million days in hospital annually due to cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, cancer, and birth defects alone. The environment has a tremendous influence on our health and well-being.

Through local trust committees and island municipalities, the Islands Trust makes land-use planning decisions that affect housing density, land development, water and waste resources,

transportation and other issues related to the quality of the environment. To some extent these decisions are guided by policies set by the Islands Trust Council.

A declaration by the Islands Trust Council recognizing the right to a healthy environment would show support for residents' rights to clean air, clean water and safe food, signal leadership in building a healthy, sustainable community and draw attention to the Canadian Constitution's silence on environmental issues.

To learn more about this grassroots campaign, visit [www.bluedot.ca](http://www.bluedot.ca) and watch the videos:

David Suzuki Foundation - Today is the Day We Decide:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D43PJOBLCJI>

Shane Koyczan - Shoulders:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=An4a-NjiIY&feature=youtu.be>