



For immediate release: Monday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## **Statement from Indigenous and environmental groups in solidarity with Indigenous nations testifying today about the Imperial Oil toxic leak**

INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION, KEEPERS OF THE WATER, ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE

OTTAWA | TRADITIONAL, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE ALGONQUIN ANISHNAABEG PEOPLE – We stand in support of the Indigenous nations seeking justice for the damage caused by Imperial Oil’s toxic wastewater leak and demand accountability for concealing and minimizing the severity of this incident for nine whole months. This week’s hearings are welcome but are only a fraction of the action the federal government must take. Canada must seek justice under relevant federal laws, including the Fisheries Act, and provide a comprehensive baseline human health study over the next ten years. We also stand with the impacted nations in calling on Canada, Alberta, and the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to inspect the structural integrity of all tailing ponds and fill regulatory gaps that allow oil companies to get away with environmental contamination and ongoing colonial violence against these communities.

The Imperial Oil tailings disaster, which allowed 5.3 million litres of toxic wastewater to overflow into the environment (and an additional unknown volume of tailings to drain into the Muskeg), is indicative of Imperial Oil’s lack of concern for Indigenous lives. It is unacceptable that downstream Indigenous nations, including Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation, were kept in the dark about the leak for nine months. Tailings “ponds” violate Indigenous nations’ inherent and treaty rights, including those of harvesting foods and medicine from their territories and practicing land-based ceremonies, due to the ongoing contamination of lands, water, air, animals, and plants.

For over forty-five years, the Alberta and federal governments have turned a blind eye to the environmental racism happening in the tar sands, allowing disasters like Imperial’s recent leak to take place. Their negligence has resulted in the accumulation of over 1.4 trillion liters of toxic waste on the banks of the Athabasca River, which covers a land area more than 2.6 times larger than Vancouver. Governments must uphold Indigenous rights and hold Industry accountable for toxic tar sands waste and its harmful impacts.

### **Background information:**

- Indigenous nations downstream of the tar sands [are appearing at the Standing Committee](#) on Environment and Sustainable Development (ENVI) on April 17, 2023, to speak to a recent incident in which toxic industrial wastewater from Imperial Oil’s Kearl site in the tar sands spilled into the environment.

- Imperial Oil Limited, which is 69.6 percent owned by ExxonMobil, the Alberta Energy Regulator, and Environment and Climate Change Canada are scheduled to also appear at ENVI on April 20th and 24th.
- The tar sands' tailings "ponds" now contain over 1.4 trillion litres of waste, covering an area [more than 2.6 times the size of Vancouver](#).
- For more information about tar sands tailings "ponds" please see this [fact sheet](#).

ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE ([environmentaldefence.ca](http://environmentaldefence.ca)): Environmental Defence is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization that works with government, industry and individuals to defend clean water, a safe climate and healthy communities.

About KEEPERS OF THE WATER ([keepersofthewater.ca](http://keepersofthewater.ca)): Keepers of the Water are First Nations, Métis, Inuit, environmental groups, concerned citizens, and communities working together for the protection of water, air, land, and all living things within the Arctic Ocean Drainage Basin.

About INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION ([indigenousclimateaction.com](http://indigenousclimateaction.com)) Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) is an Indigenous-led climate justice organization guided by a diverse group of Indigenous knowledge keepers, water protectors and land defenders from communities and regions across so-called Canada.

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