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September 5, 2018

File No.: 5020-30

Via email: pm@pm.gc.ca

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

We, as elected representatives for the islands in the Salish Sea in both British Columbia and Washington State, write to express our disappointment at the news of your government's decision to purchase the Trans Mountain Pipeline and proceed with trying to expand it despite the recent Court of Appeal ruling. We also affirm that we stand united with the Governments of British Columbia, Washington State and First Nations in their efforts to protect the Pacific Coast and the people who live here and hope you will use the opportunity of the court decision to reconsider the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

We believe your plan to transform our waters into an export corridor for nearly a million barrels of toxic bitumen per day for the next 50 or more years exposes us to unacceptable levels of risk. Because we live along this corridor of risk, we feel compelled to speak out at this critical moment.

The islands in the Salish Sea have been described as the Pacific Coast's answer to cottage country but for us, it's where we work and play; where we raise our children, grow our food, and make our lives. Tourism is a major part of our economy, with visitors coming from all over the world. The Salish Sea is a living legacy, essential to our shared, collective identity, as much as the Rockies, the prairies, or the Great Lakes. Its protection should be a national priority on both sides of the border.

In 1973, an International Joint Commission proposed that the islands and waters adjacent to the British Columbia-Washington State border be protected as an international park. This region has some of the world's most biologically rich waters, historically abundant with salmon, while the islands provide habitats for countless species. This ecological legacy is due to the careful stewardship by the Coast Salish people who have lived in this region since time immemorial and whose culture remains tied to these traditional territories and waters.

Despite an international reputation as a pristine environment, the Salish Sea faces immense pressure from ever-increasing levels of industrialization, marine shipping traffic, and climate change. Into this already stressed environment, the Trans Mountain expansion will introduce 400 more oil tankers a year. There is growing concern that this sevenfold increase in tanker traffic, with its increase in underwater noise, could be the death knell for the southern resident killer whale population. Even the National Energy Board's own review concluded that expansion will have significant negative impacts on the orcas. To us, risking the existence of the iconic and beloved southern resident orca for a hope that new markets for oil will open on the Pacific Rim is not in the national interest.

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Accidents happen. Forced to navigate narrow waterways and powerful ocean currents, the project's tankers will move through Turn Point/Boundary Pass, an area your experts have identified as one of the most likely places in Canada for a large oil spill. It is hard to fathom the terrible ecological and economic consequences of an oil spill: the places we love soaked in toxic, diluted bitumen below clouds of condensate; salmon runs destroyed, jobs lost, businesses closed. In hours, everything in our lives and world would change.

For seventeen days this summer, an orca – Tahlequah or J35 – carried her dead calf through the waters of the Salish Sea. Her journey took her past our homes. It was haunting. Her actions seem like a direct message to us: that through our treatment of her environment – her home – we are responsible for the death of her infant.

Still reeling from that experience, our region was then blanketed in smoke as B.C. declared, for the second year in a row, a state of emergency from wildfire season.

Is this our new reality: summers of dying whales and unbreathable air? A reality shaped by climate change. A reality shaped by short-sighted dependence on fossil fuels. We object to Trans Mountain not just because we live along the corridor of risk but because we believe that the environmental and economic costs are simply too high. We believe there are more visionary and less risky ways to spend billions of dollars to generate jobs and taxes for roads, schools, and hospitals.

Tahlequah is our canary in a coal mine. There are limits to what our environment can withstand. We are nearing the breaking point. The Federal Court of Appeal decision has given us a second chance. An opportunity to consider what is truly in the national interest and what is best for our environment and the future.

Sincerely,

Chair Bill Watson, San Juan County Council

Councilor Rick Hughes, San Juan County Council

Councilor Jamie Stephens, San Juan County Council

Chair Peter Luckham, Islands Trust Council

Vice Chair Laura Busheikin, Islands Trust Council

Vice Chair George Grams, Islands Trust Council

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Trustee Sandy Pottle

Trustee Dan Rogers

Trustee Wendy Scholefield

Trustee Kate-Louise Stamford