

Overview of the Report of the Joint Table on First Nations Waste Management

Introduction

First Nations waste management is in crisis. There are currently over 1,800 contaminated sites on reserve, of which nearly half (43%) are attributed to improper waste management and illegal dumping.

Historic and ongoing gaps in funding, together with an outdated and weak regulatory framework, have resulted in the significant contamination and degradation of reserve lands from unauthorized dumping and improper waste disposal. These funding and regulatory gaps continue to compromise the health and safety of First Nations as well as place communities at an economic competitive disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous communities.

These constraints have also left First Nations increasingly vulnerable to illegal dumping. The penalty for illegal dumping under the federal regulations is a \$100 fine. By comparison, penalties for commercial entities under provincial regulations begin at hundreds of thousands of dollars and increase with subsequent offenses.

First Nations agree that federal funding levels and the *Indian Reserve Waste Disposal Regulations* have not been an appropriate answer to these issues. Insufficient, outdated and ineffective, they fail to cover basic aspects of contemporary waste management, disposal, diversion, compliance, and employee protections.

In February 2026, following a year of engagement with experts and communities, the Joint Table on Waste Management released its consensus report titled ***Waste Management in Crisis: Recommendations to Strengthen First Nations Stewardship over their Lands and Waters***. The report outlines a series of recommendations which, when implemented, would fully recognize First Nations control over waste management and lay the necessary foundations for improved waste management systems and tools.

About the Joint Table

Established in December 2024, the First Nations-led Joint Table on Waste Management was mandated by the federal government to develop options to address waste management and unauthorized dumping on reserve lands. First Nations technical, regional and national representative organizations from across the country worked together to develop practical, community-informed, and culturally-grounded solutions. Joint Table members met with several experts and communities to ground their proposals in lived experiences.

Participating organizations included:

- Anishinabek Nation (ON)
- Assembly of First Nations
- Chiefs of Ontario
- Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (NS)
- Environment and Climate Change Canada
- First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute
- First Nations Technical Services Advisory Group Inc. (AB)
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Indigenous Zero Waste Technical Advisory Group (BC)
- Lands Advisory Board Resource Centre (ex officio member)
- National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association
- Ontario First Nations Technical Services
- Saskatchewan Aboriginal Land Technicians
- Southern Chiefs Organization Inc. (MB)
- Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory (ON)

The Joint Table responds to the priorities of First Nations, as confirmed through various resolutions of the Chiefs in Assembly of the Assembly of First Nations. These resolutions call on the federal government to take immediate steps to address the disparity in environmental protections on reserve, including for waste management. The *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* further affirms this priority through Article 29, which provides for the right of Indigenous peoples to the conservation and protection of the environment and commits governments to taking appropriate action in this regard.

Report Recommendations

The Joint Table identified systemic barriers that must be addressed to advance equitable and

effective waste management solutions. Specifically, they call on the federal government to:

On First Nations Jurisdiction and Regulations

- Provide legal recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over waste management and a jointly developed regulatory framework to replace the *Indian Reserve Waste Disposal Regulations*.

On Funding

- Shift all project-based waste management funding to stable, sustained core funding, recognizing waste management as an essential public service.

On Capacity

- Establish a First Nations-led Waste Operator/Coordinator Training and Certification Initiative that reflects local needs and modern operational standards.
- Provide long-term federal funding for dedicated waste coordinator positions.

On Unauthorized Dumping

- Use a collaborative approach to address illegal dumping on reserves by third parties through Part 9 of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*.
- Develop a report outlining implementation options/ mechanisms to redirect fine revenues to affected First Nations for Ministers and First Nations leadership by March 2027.

On Partnerships

- Develop a First Nations–specific Extended Producer Action (EPR) Plan that builds on best practices, partners with Indigenous communities, and identifies needed infrastructure and training investments to support effective diversion programs and long-term cost savings.

Phased Implementation

While some measures can be implemented in the near or medium term, others, such as regulatory modernization, will take longer as they require meaningful consultation with affected communities and the joint development of standards/regulations.

Recognizing that a phased approach may be required, the Joint Table has proposed the following implementation framework.

Time Period	Key Implementation Steps
SHORT-TERM (1–2 YEARS) 2026-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Begin National Needs Assessment ▪ Launch engagement on Waste Operator Training & Certification pilots. ▪ Formalize CEPA collaboration for external polluters. ▪ Begin early investments in community awareness and voluntary compliance.
MEDIUM-TERM (2–5 YEARS) 2027–2031	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transition federal funding to core, sustainable models. ▪ Expand waste operator certification program nationally via regional delivery models. ▪ Support development of First Nations waste laws and enforcement models. ▪ Co-develop a draft legislative framework with First Nations. ▪ Scale up diversion partnerships and infrastructure investment.
LONG-TERM (5-7 YEARS) 2031-2038	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enact federal legislation recognizing First Nations jurisdiction/new regulations. ▪ Transfer jurisdiction to First Nations as communities reach readiness. ▪ Maintain ongoing certification, training, and capacity supports. ▪ Advance EPR partnerships and long-term infrastructure renewal.

