

Delivered by email: premier@gov.ab.ca

March 18, 2021

The Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Dear Premier,

I am writing on behalf of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to express our deep dissatisfaction with recently announced changes to the Province's Disaster Recovery Program (DRP).

With annual disaster recovery costs steadily increasing across Canada, and Alberta's position as the single largest recipient overall in the Federal Government's Disaster Funding Assistance Agreements (DFAA), modifications to the program were anticipated. However, the same cannot be said of the Province's decision to make such an important policy change in the complete absence of consultation with residents and municipalities—and before the Government of Canada announced changes at the federal level. Ultimately, this approach has added unnecessary stress and future uncertainty for Albertans during an extremely challenging time.

The changes to the DRP not only download some financial impacts of natural disasters to municipalities, they also increase financial risk to hardworking Albertans. As support is capped at a maximum of \$500,000—below the current average cost of a single-family detached home in Fort McMurray—and limited to a one-time payout per property, residents will be exposed to greater financial risk should disaster strike again in the future. This is expected to have a significant negative impact on property valuations, in the region and across the province, and potentially dire consequences for home and business owners.

Another troubling feature of this policy change is that appears to be a one-off decision made in isolation. It is not presented as part of a larger strategy that engages residents and stakeholders, articulates a coherent vision for disaster mitigation and includes accessible and affordable overland flood insurance. Instead, it offers a haphazard, piecemeal approach, marked by a lack of communication with impacted residents, businesses and property owners, and creates the impression that the Province has passed costs on to citizens without due consideration to the broader, long-term impacts.

Premier, it is especially unfortunate that these substantial changes have been introduced at a time when Albertans grapple with the realities of the global pandemic, lingering uncertainty in the energy sector and, in the case of the RMWB and other communities, ongoing recovery from the 2020 flood. I urge you to reconsider this decision and instead move towards a provincial strategy aimed at enhancing community resilience through continued collaboration with the federal government, insurance industry and other stakeholders, and increased, stable funding for disaster mitigation projects and initiatives.

Albertans have extensive experience with natural disasters and could capitalize on that expertise and motivation to provide leadership on flood and disaster mitigation, as well as other disaster preparedness-related matters. I encourage your Government to seize this opportunity and ensure that the Province's approach to disaster recovery is one that builds community resilience, promotes the implementation of robust risk mitigation measures and supports the needs of vulnerable Albertans.

Sincerely,

Section 17 (1) FOIP

Don Scott, QC
Mayor

cc: Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Hon. Ric McIver, Minister of Transportation and Municipal Affairs
Tany Yao, MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo
Laila Goodridge, MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
Barry Morishita, President, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)
Paul McLaughlin, President, Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA)
Chair and Members of Alberta's Mid-Sized Mayor's Caucus (MCMC)
David Yurdiga, MP for Fort McMurray-Cold Lake
Councillors of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
Jamie Doyle, Chief Administrative Officer, RMWB