

ON THE DEFENSIVE

HARPER GOVERNMENT BACKTRACKS ON BULK WATER EXPORTS AS COUNCIL HOLDS “OPEN DOOR” MEETING IN CALGARY

by Ariel Troster

Leaked documents, secret meetings and denials from governments. It sounds like tabloid fare, or a plot from a Hollywood movie. But sure enough, this story is taking place in Canada. And what’s the source of all the intrigue? Plans that are underway to export water in bulk to the United States, in a move to promote greater Canada-U.S. integration.

In April 2007, the Council of Canadians obtained a leaked document produced by a Washington think tank, revealing that business and government leaders in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico were actively discussing bulk water exports. We received notice that an initiative called the “North American Future 2025 Project” was being led by the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies,



The Council’s Jacqueline Reid and Susan Howatt delivering 45,000 petitions to Environment Minister John Baird on March 22.

The Conference Board of Canada and the Mexican Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. The Project calls for a series of “closed-door meetings” on North American integration dealing with a number of highly contentious issues including bulk water exports, a joint security perimeter and a continental resource pact.

According to the leaked document, a roundtable on the “Future of the North American Environment,” was planned for Friday, April 27, in Calgary, and on the agenda was “water consumption, water transfers and artificial diversions of bulk water” with the aim of achieving “joint optimum utilization of the available water.”

“This is just the latest in a series of closed-door meetings that grant the business sector privileged access while shutting out the public,” said Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians. “The document is damning not just because it outlines a process that lacks transparency and accountability, but also because of what is being discussed by governments and so-called corporate stakeholders.”

The document also reveals that “trilateral coordination of energy policy” and the development of “North American security architecture” are being discussed by high-level government officials from Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

GOVERNMENT DENIAL

Within days of the Council releasing the damning document, Environment

BULK WATER EXPORTS: A TIMELINE

1998: Sun Belt Water Inc.

A California company files suit under Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), after British Columbia bans the export of bulk water. Sun Belt sought to export Canadian water to California and is seeking \$10.5 billion in damages.

1998: Nova Corporation

In Ontario, Premier Mike Harris issues a permit to the Nova Corporation to export water in tankers to sell on the Asian market. Public outcry led by the Council of Canadians forces the government to cancel the permit, triggering negotiations between Ontario, Quebec and the eight U.S. states surrounding the Great Lakes over water removals from the lakes.

2001: Gisborne Lake

In Newfoundland, the government of Premier Roger Grimes states that there are no legal or environmental obstacles to his plan to export water in bulk from Gisborne Lake. The Council of Canadians rallies opposition to Grimes’s plan, and the government backs down, but only after determining that potential profits wouldn’t have been as high as anticipated.

Minister John Baird issued a statement saying that the Canadian government “has no intention of entering into negotiations, behind closed doors or otherwise, regarding the issue of bulk water exports.”

The Council could see that Baird’s assurances were full of holes, so we responded with a press release, saying, “Minister Baird’s claims that current legislation prohibits bulk water exports are inaccurate.” We pointed out that the provincial accords he mentioned are voluntary and can be broken at any time. And even worse, the so-called prohibition on bulk water exports contained in the 1909 International Boundary Waters Treaty Act only applies to waters that are shared with the U.S. It doesn’t apply to what the U.S. is really after – water from Canada’s North.

OPENING UP THE DEBATE

On April 25, the Council of Canadians held an “open door” meeting in Calgary that brought together environmental and labour groups with members of the public, to speak out against the secrecy of the Future 2025 Project and discuss the looming threats to Canadian water posed by North American integration.

Ralph Pentland, an environmental policy consultant with over 40 years of experience working on water issues, debunked some myths about Canada’s water.

“Canada and the U.S. actually have almost identical amounts of renewable water supplies,” said Pentland, at the meeting on April 25th. “The U.S. consumes less than 10 per cent of its supply.

THE NORTH AMERICAN FUTURE 2025 PROJECT

Under the title North American Future 2025 Project, the U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in collaboration with The Conference Board of Canada and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), is currently holding a series of “closed-door roundtable sessions” with government “practitioners” and private sector “stakeholders” in order to “strengthen the capacity of Canadian, U.S., and Mexican administration officials and that of their respective legislatures to *analyze, comprehend, and anticipate* North American integration” (emphasis ours).

According to leaked documents obtained by the Council of Canadians:

Bulk water exports are being discussed: A roundtable on the “Future of the North American Environment” took place on Friday, April 27, 2007 in Calgary, and participants were scheduled to discuss “water consumption, water transfers and artificial diversions of bulk water” with the aim of achieving “joint optimum utilization of the available water.”

The Canadian government is intimately involved: According to the CSIS report, the Future 2025 Project

will focus on “labor mobility, energy, the environment, competitiveness, and border infrastructure and logistics.” These are exactly the same policy areas currently being integrated between Canada, Mexico and the U.S. through executive-level, closed-door meetings of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), agreed to by the leaders of all three countries in March 2005.

This is about drafting policy, not making recommendations: CSIS isn’t just any think tank. The organization describes itself as “a strategic planning partner for the government.” And according to the leaked documents, all three governments have agreed “that there would be a tremendous benefit to the current decision-makers” if a roundtable on border issues could serve “as the underpinnings to develop a blueprint for future border infrastructure and logistics systems as it relates to labor mobility, energy, the environment, security, and competitiveness.”

CSIS’ final report is to be reviewed twice by the Canadian, Mexican and U.S. governments before September 2007, when it will be resubmitted to these governments with the aim of “maximizing the policy impact.”

Excerpted from a backgrounder prepared by the Council of Canadians. Visit www.canadians.org/water to read the full document.

2001: Amendment of International Boundary Waters Treaty

The Canadian government amends the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act, in an attempt to prohibit bulk removals from boundary water basins within Canada. This amendment applies only to boundary waters and not groundwater or surface waters, and provides no protection for the rivers of Canada’s north.

2004: Tay River

Council of Canadians activists declare victory after Ontario’s new provincial government cancels the controversial water-taking permit issued by former premier Mike Harris to OMYA Canada Inc. The permit would have allowed the Swiss-based transnational to take approximately 4.5 million litres of water per day from the Tay River near Perth, Ontario.

2004: Quebec

Environment Minister Thomas Mulcair signals that he’s interested in pursuing bulk water exports from Quebec, despite a 2001 provincial ban. Public outcry causes the Quebec government to hold off.

There are local and regional shortages in both countries. But there are also local and regional solutions available to solve each and every one of those problems, and both countries would be better off pursuing them,” he said.

Susan Howatt, the Council of Canadians’ National Water Campaigner, stressed that bulk water exports are not a sustainable solution to water scarcity:

“Water shortages are very real, and common thinking is that two-thirds of the U.S. states may run dry very soon,” said Howatt. “But artificially withdrawing water from one watershed and shipping it to another is not the answer and will not address shortages. Instead, it will ensure that those who can afford it can have all the water they want, and those who cannot will have to go without.”

The Council’s meeting on April 25th had an impact: Two days later, the Conservative government pulled its representatives from the Future 2025 meeting. Sources tell us that members of the federal government were actually stopped at the Calgary airport the day of the meeting and sent back home.

Is it possible that the government may be getting the message that secret discussions about bulk water exports are a bad idea?

Ariel Troster is the Publications Officer at the Council of Canadians, and Editor of *Canadian Perspectives*.

“PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT WATER”

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS’ SUSAN HOWATT

With the threat of bulk water exports making the news a lot these days, *Canadian Perspectives* sat down with Susan Howatt, the Council of Canadians’ National Water Campaigner, to talk about current threats to Canada’s water and what we can do to make a difference.

Why are bulk water exports such a hot issue right now?

Well, the global water crisis is undeniable. The United Nations predicts that if present trends continue, there will be shortages all over the world. Former Alberta premier Peter Lougheed has publicly mused that the United States will be “coming after fresh water aggressively within three to five years.” Paul Celucci, the former U.S. ambassador to Canada, stated in January 2006 that it was “odd” that water was not traded as a commodity in the same manner as lumber, oil and natural gas. People are talking about water, because there’s no denying any more that there’s a global crisis.

Why do bulk water exports represent a threat to Canada’s water?

Water is finite, and bulk water exports represent a permanent removal of water from the ecosystem. The majority of

our water supply is in the north and it would require massive engineering projects to deliver it to the southern population. The Great Lakes levels are dropping due to climate change, and this is significant given that only 1 per cent of the water is renewable.

The trade implications for bulk water exports are very real. The national treatment and proportional sharing clauses in NAFTA ensure that once you start shipping water across the border, any level of government is powerless to stop corporations from demanding access. And the Security and Prosperity Partnership represents a further race to the bottom in terms of the environmental regulations that govern Canada’s water.

What should the government do to protect Canada’s water?

The real solution lies in developing a national water policy that enshrines the right to water and closes the door forever to bulk water exports. The current federal water policy was drafted 20 years ago, and predates both the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA. The Council of Canadians and many of our allies are working hard to convince Ottawa to declare water a human right and close the door to corporate control and commodification of Canada’s water.

To learn more about bulk water exports, the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and what you can do to protect Canada’s water, visit www.canadians.org. Or call us at 1-800-387-7177.

– Ariel Troster

2005: Great Lakes Charter Annex

On December 13, the Great Lakes Charter Annex Implementing Agreement is signed by Ontario, Quebec and the eight U.S. states that border the Great Lakes. Although it purports to ban diversions from the Great Lakes, the Annex allows for diversions to straddling communities and counties in the Great Lakes basin, including the controversial Chicago diversion.

2006: Adams Lake proposal

A Kamloops entrepreneur applies to the B.C. government for a licence to drain one million imperial gallons of water a day for export to the Middle East. The proposal is withdrawn after strong opposition by the B.C. chapter of the Sierra Club of Canada and the Council of Canadians.

2007: North American Future 2025 Project

The Council of Canadians blows the whistle on a closed-door meeting in Calgary on bulk water exports, after receiving a leaked document revealing the aims of the North American Future Project 2025.

– Susan Howatt