

CANADA NEEDS A NATIONAL WATER POLICY



Water is vital to people's health and livelihoods. In Canada, there is no national strategy to address urgent water issues and no federal leadership to conserve and protect our water. The Federal Water Policy is over 20 years old and badly outdated. There is a growing list of crises facing our freshwater including contamination, shortages and pressure to export water to the United States through pipelines and diversions.

It is time for the Government of Canada to implement a comprehensive National Water Policy.

Bulk Water Exports

Canada and the United States share interconnected water systems. The Great Lakes hold 20 per cent of the world's fresh water, providing drinking water to 45 million people. The Great Lakes Annex agreement, signed in December 2005 by Ontario, Quebec and eight U.S. states, will allow diversions, through permissive exceptions, while not guaranteeing a strong role for the government of Canada to preserve and protect its water supply. North Dakota is just one state that is facing water shortages and looking north for a new supply through diversions or interbasin transfers. Bulk water exports and diversions would leave Canada's water vulnerable to environmental depletion and to international trade challenges that could permanently open the floodgates to parched U.S. states.

A new National Water Policy must ban the export of water, implement strict restrictions on diversions, and affirm the role of the federal government in international water issues.

Water contamination

In 2000, seven people died in the community of Walkerton, Ontario when their drinking water was contaminated with E. coli virus. In 2001, more than 7,000 people were made sick during a three-month period by parasite-infected water in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. In 2005, people in Kasechewan, a Cree community in Ontario, were forced to evacuate their homes because of water contamination. According

to the Government of Canada, municipalities issue hundreds of boil water advisories a year, most as the result of water contamination. Since December 16, 2005, 74 boil water advisories have been issued for First Nations communities in Canada. These numbers show an alarming trend.

A new National Water Policy must create national clean drinking water standards.

Privatization of drinking water

Communities across the country are in desperate need of money to pay for water pipes and filtration systems, which are now the responsibility of municipal governments. These governments are now looking to private investors to rebuild infrastructure through public-private partnerships (P3s). Water is a public health and safety concern and is best managed, regulated and financed by public systems that are accountable to the community. When for-profit interests control drinking water, quality decreases and cost increases.

A new National Water Policy must commit to a federal government investment plan for municipalities.

The growing crisis of water shortages

Water is essential for all life, but it is a finite resource. Even in Canada, a water-rich nation, one quarter of Canadian municipalities have faced shortages and currently one third rely on groundwater — a resource we have dangerously little data on — to provide for daily needs. Water shortages in the Prairies cost \$5 billion in economic damage in 2001 alone. At the same time, Canadians waste a tremendous amount of water every day.

A new National Water Policy must implement a comprehensive conservation strategy and invest in water resource research and monitoring.

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Water and NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) defines water as a “service” and an “investment,” leaving Canadian water vulnerable to thirsty foreign investors. Once Canada allows water to be withdrawn and transported to other countries for large-scale industrial purposes, foreign investors must be given the same “national treatment” as Canadian companies.

A new National Water Policy must ensure water does not become a tradable commodity in current and future trade deals.

Take Action for a National Water Policy

It is time for the federal government to develop a National Water Policy that affirms the right to water and protects Canadian water from commodification, diversion, bulk exports and privatization.

The future of Canada’s water depends on it.

Tell Stephen Harper that Canada needs a National Water Policy

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has failed to clarify his government’s position on bulk water exports, and the Conservative Party platform did nothing to address growing concerns about the stability and quality of Canada’s water supply.

Contact Stephen Harper and let him know that Canada needs a National Water Policy to address the following:

1. The free market doesn’t guarantee access to water.
2. Bulk exports could open the floodgates to trade challenges.
3. Canada’s water supply is limited.
4. Public water is safer, cleaner and more affordable.
5. Water is essential for people and nature.

Contact information for Stephen Harper:

E-mail: pm@pm.gc.ca

Fax: 613-941-6900

Mail: Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2



For more information on how to protect Canadian water, check out www.canadians.org, or call 1-800-387-7177.