

Canada's water under pressure: Five reasons to oppose bulk water exports

The world is running out of clean water. The U.S. population is exploding, and the American southwest is mining water for industrial and agricultural purposes faster than nature can replenish it. Business leaders see diversions and wholesale bulk water exports as the solution to the global water crisis. However these band-aid solutions do little more than worsen the situation while failing to address the real management and rights issues at the core of the water struggle.

Here are five reasons to oppose bulk water exports:

- 1. Canada does not have a surplus of water.** Contrary to popular belief, Canada holds 6.5 per cent of the world's renewable water resources (as compared to the incorrect figure of 20 per cent being touted by corporate leaders). More than one quarter of municipalities have faced shortages in recent years, and only 1 per cent of water in the Great Lakes is renewable.
- 2. Once it's gone, it's gone.** Water is a finite resource. Bulk water exports permanently remove water from the ecosystem at a time when climate change is already drying up traditional surface water sources like the Great Lakes.
- 3. Trade agreements could open the floodgates.** 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 diverted outside our borders for large scale industrial purposes, foreign investors must be given the same "national treatment" as Canadian companies.

- 4. Canada has no ban on bulk exports.** There is a voluntary provincial ban on bulk exports, but any province could break it any time, and would it not withstand a NAFTA challenge. In recent years, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland have all considered licensing schemes for bulk water exports.

- 5. The Security and Prosperity Partnership means water is on the table.** The SPP was agreed to in 2005 by the leaders of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico with no debate by Parliament or the public. In March 2006, a major Washington-based think tank funded by the U.S. government launched the North American Future 2025 Project, "to help guide the ongoing Security and Prosperity Partnership," according to the *Ottawa Citizen*. Leaked documents obtained by the Council of Canadians indicate that bulk water exports have been a subject of discussion among corporate leaders and government officials at the Project's behind-closed door meetings.

Water is not a commodity to be bought and sold. Bulk water exports will not address the issues of water scarcity, urban sprawl and wastage. Allowing water to be traded as an export would create a market system that would determine access to water by ability to pay.

Water exports could spell disaster for the environment and for human rights. Displacing water from one place to another spreads desertification. In this age of global warming, we need to address drought through sustainable conservation strategies administered by the public sector.

Canada needs an effective National Water Policy that bans the export of water, implements strict restrictions on water diversions, and recognizes a strong federal role in the protection of this valuable resource.

