

## Water for Sustainability -- A Strategy

2006

In an effort to sustain quality of life, healthy water quality and economic well being, the Canadian Water Resources Association has circulated "Sustainability Principles" for Water Resources management. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is concerned how best to deal with "significant pressures" that Canada is facing on its water resources. The past several years have provided us with numerous examples of the need for a national water strategy. The floods, the droughts, the Great Lakes pollution problems, the waterborne infectious diseases, the issue of water exports, the variability of our climates and the impact of man's activities on that climate all speak to the need for a coordinated effort between the federal, provincial and municipal governments to develop national practices and policies for one of our most precious resources.

Historically and economically, Canada has been shaped by our waterways and infrastructure. The benefits that we have derived from water are diverse. Canada has more lakes than any other country. We have more water per capita than any other large country. Unfortunately we tend to take water for granted and undervalue it. Canada's per capita water use is among the highest in the world, twice as much as the average European. Despite the fact that Canada possesses 9 percent of the world's fresh water supply, Canada is not necessarily a water rich country. Viewed globally, Canada's land mass is proportional to its water supply. Approximately 60 percent of Canada's fresh water drains north, while 90 percent of our population lives within 300 kilometers of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Therefore the preponderance of Canada's fresh water is not available to the area in which it is needed.

In 1987, the federal fresh water policy was tabled in parliament. This policy outlined five strategies: water pricing, science leadership, integrated planning, legislation and public awareness. Since 1987 water quality has become an important issue and it should be added as a sixth strategy. Although the agencies that once looked after federal water policy have been rearranged and divided among many federal departments, the need for a comprehensive cooperative water strategy and policy remains with us today. There is an opportunity for standardized water policies, practices and cooperative legislation to preserve and protect our water resource for future generations.

Canada's focus of "Source to Tap" should include specific outcomes for:

1. Safe, secure drinking water.
2. Healthy aquatic ecosystems.
3. Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.
4. Knowledge to make effective water management decisions by:
  - cross ministry knowledge sharing (team approach)
  - sharing of resources
  - adoption of a watershed approach to management and decision-making
  - involvement of all Canadians in managing water supplies and resources;
  - increasing knowledge and understanding of water resources issues;
  - increasing water conservation activities;
  - allocating water resources more effectively;
  - promoting healthy aquatic ecosystems;
  - protecting surface and groundwater quality

- ensuring Canadians have safe and secured drinking water.

Water touches all of our lives and is a significant factor in the economy of all sectors, but good information at the federal level about the water resource base and various uses is lacking. The development of an effective water policy and strategy can only be undertaken with full knowledge of the quantity and quality of total water supply along with a consideration of water use. To the extent that the watershed approach to water resource management is adopted, so should the reporting of water source; uses and returns.

The Canadian Chamber fully expects the Canadian government to seek further comments and feedback from stakeholders on, further, more detailed, action plans for preservation and conservation of both surface water and groundwater quality that emerge from any consultative process.

## **Recommendations**

That the federal government:

1. Take a leadership role in bringing the provinces and territories together to place an urgent and high priority on water management issues in the country.
2. Reintroduce the federal fresh water strategy from 1998 as a foundation for the creation of a national water management strategy.
  - Include the Provinces, Territories and water use stakeholders in the strategy development stage.
  - Obtain comments and feedback from all stakeholders in the development of detailed action plans.
3. Place a high priority on development and implementation of a reporting structure that will inform Canadians annually on:
  - A comprehensive inventory of the quality and quantity of all Water reserves
  - The uses by activity (e. g. residential water use, agricultural irrigation, enhanced oil recovery, power generation, etc.),
  - The quantity and quality of Water returned, if any, from the various uses.
4. Support research and data collection for proper forecasting of upstream flows and possible long-term changes which may impact activities in the areas of water management.
5. Ensure that water -- apportionment agreements do not prejudice future developments in the watershed providing the Water.
6. Commit that costs for access to expertise and financial requirements for planning, implementing and measuring are not downloaded as primary responsibilities of municipalities:
  - Take a proactive role with respect to feasibility studies, infrastructure development, water supply, and conservation projects.
  - Support research and data collection for proper forecasting of stream flows and possible long-term flow changes, which may impact development activities in the areas of water management.
7. Encourage the associated federal government departments to introduce a national water management strategy developed in concert with the provinces, territories and water use stakeholders.

8. Utilize a cross ministry team approach, which would assist both the federal government and the users in their quest for consolidation of information and resources.
9. Take an active role in communicating and promoting conservation measures (such as watershed protection) and awareness to increase the understanding of the various water management responsibilities of municipalities, irrigation districts, conservation authorities, and provinces and territories throughout the country.
10. Work on water issues in a manner that supports and adds value to the water management activities being undertaken by the provinces [i.e. Alberta, Water for Life; Ontario, Source Water Protection] via partnerships and funding support that will promote regional, place-based, stakeholder-driven solutions.
11. Strive to obtain cooperation with United States federal and state governments in these initiatives so that they are not undermined by conflicting activities in the United States.