

From: Mike Wallis [info@bccranberrygrowers.com]
Sent: April-30-10 4:04 PM
To: Living Water Smart ENV:EX
Cc: Andy@bcac.bc.ca; 'Bob Hopcott'; Brian Mauza; Darsh Banns; Dave Duchek; Grant Keefer; greenbelt@eastlink.ca; Lisa Enfield; Lisa May; Todd May
Subject: BCCGA WAM submission
Attachments: BCCGA WATER ACT Response 2010.04.30.pdf; Water Policy Statement for Agriculture.pdf

Please accept our submission regarding requested input on the WATER ACT Modernization Discussion Paper. we have included the BCAC Water Policy Statement for Agriculture for reference.

Thank you.

Mike Wallis
Executive Director

[BCCGA / CCGC](#)
[21538-87B AVE.](#)
[Langley, BC V1M 2E6](#)
[604-309-9868; fax: 604-513-0188](#)
www.bccranberrygrowers.com



WATER POLICY FOR AGRICULTURE

The primary interests of the agriculture sector in water supply and allocation are:

- 1. Water security: protecting agricultural access to water which recognizes principles of adequate supply, assured access, and affordability.**
- 2. Development of a Drought Management Strategy**
- 3. Regulation of the water supply, to ensure that all users contribute to conservation.**

To further these interests, the BC Agricultural Council will:

- Work actively to raise the public awareness of agriculture sector's dependence on water.
- Insist that the preservation of farmland and maintenance of the Agriculture Land Reserve in many regions requires the provision of adequate water at a not for profit cost and security of access to produce agricultural products on that land.
- Promote the inclusion of agricultural association representatives on local, provincial, and federal government-sponsored groups that have an impact on the water supply for agriculture.
- Ensure that agriculture industry representatives are included in all on-going water policy development processes at all levels of government.
- Insist that it is essential that agriculture have high priority access to water in recognition of provincial food security needs.

In developing policy the Council accepts that:

- Climate change models forecast reduced water supply and increased demand for water, especially in the arid areas of BC: Eastern Vancouver Island, high plateau rangeland, and the Okanagan-Similkameen valleys.



- Water use per capita in BC is high, compared to other regions.
- Adoption of conservation practices is a cost effective means to address future needs and may be a preferred option to expanding capacity in certain areas.
- Agriculture lands have high variability in soil types, crops and water requirements resulting in regional and commodity specific issues.

The BC Agriculture Council endorses the following principles for establishing water policy:

1. Representatives of agricultural associations must be included on water decision-making and advisory bodies, if government policy is to be credible.
2. Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) fish protection policy must not seek control over man-made water reservoirs without compensation to the license holders of that water or payment for a fair share of the maintenance of the water supply infrastructure. If DFO decides not to provide compensation, then DFO must be satisfied with stream flows that would naturally occur.
3. Government's official declaration of drought events must be linked to crop insurance programs to ensure that there is adequate coverage of drought-related crop loss. In some instances growers should receive crop insurance payments for pre-emptive and proactive actions to conserve water and which impact crops.
4. Agriculture must be involved in planning for emergency reductions of water and the development of water-trading policy. Any water trading policy must segregate agriculture, so that the allotment of water is not traded to industrial, residential or commercial sectors.
5. In the case of declared drought emergencies, users will be encouraged to work cooperatively to share the burden of reduced water allocation based on economic impact and maintenance of agriculture production capacity. Additionally, currently unavailable or non-traditional sources of water supply should be considered to address emergency needs. (e.g. parks or protected areas).



6. There should be not be any water license clawbacks where use is lower than allocation.
7. Groundwater licensing may be an option, but should only be considered in the context of full water availability and demand management and planning and only on a watershed basis.
8. Equity and fairness rules must be established by the province. As a specific current example, if water meters are installed, then water meters must be installed on farm, residential and industrial users, not on farms alone.
9. Water saved through conservation methods in agriculture will be reserved for future expansions in the agriculture sector and not allocated to other user groups.
10. The province must exercise its authority to establish a timeline and the requirement of watershed supply and demand planning on a 30, 50, and 70 year time horizon.
11. Some areas will require major infrastructure projects such as substantially increased higher elevation storage capacity and large scale water works in order to secure long term availability of irrigation water.
12. The federal and provincial governments have an important role to play in providing funds for infrastructure development, including enhancement and operation of weather station networks which provide essential information for irrigation scheduling and water conservation programs.
13. The federal and provincial governments must continue to support the Environmental Farm Planning Program, the National Farm Stewardship Program and the National Water Supply Expansion Program as essential tools to achieve water allocation and management needs.

BC WATER ACT MODERNIZATION – PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND PROPOSED OPTIONS

RESPONSE FROM THE BC CRANBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

APRIL 30, 2010

INTRODUCTION

The BC Cranberry Growers Association (BCCGA) was introduced to the Water Act Modernization process at the March 29, 2010 Workshop in Langley, BC. It is an ambitious undertaking with a short time frame allotted for policy development and engagement, but we welcome the opportunity for input.

The proposed principles for *Water Act* modernization as defined in the discussion paper are:

1. B.C.'s water resources are used within sustainable limits.
2. First Nations social and cultural practices associated with water are respected and accommodated.
3. Science informs water resource management and decision making.
4. Water resource legislation, policy and decision making processes as well as management tools are integrated across all levels of government.
5. Rules and standards for water management are clearly defined, providing a predictable investment climate across the province.
6. Flexibility is provided to adapt to extreme conditions or unexpected events on a provincial, regional or issue-specific level.
7. Incentives are created for water conservation that consider the needs of users and investors.
8. Rights to use water come with responsibilities to be efficient and help protect stream health.

It is unfortunate that the principles listed above do not mention food production and/or agriculture's requirement for adequate supply, assured access and affordability of water is respected and accommodated.

As a member of the BC Agriculture Council, we support the Council's Water Policy for Agriculture and this brief is in addition to their submission.

CRANBERRY INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

The BC cranberry industry is concentrated in the Fraser Valley, ranging from Agassiz in the east valley to Delta in the west with approximately 40% of the industry located in Richmond. Vancouver Island also has a small proportion of cranberry production.

Cranberries grow on low lying vines in beds layered with sand, peat, gravel and clay. Commercial fields use a system of wetlands, uplands, ditches, flumes, ponds and other water bodies that provide a natural habitat for a variety of plant and animal life.

The majority of cranberries are harvested between September and November and this occurs in one of two ways. A small amount (3%) of cranberry production is dry harvested. Dry harvested fruit is combed from the vines using a mechanical picking machine; no water is used in this process. The harvested fruit is then loaded into bins and shipped to receiving stations where it is cleaned and packaged as fresh fruit. By far the most common method of harvesting is wet or water harvest which accounts for approximately 97% of BC cranberry production. Cranberry beds are flooded and the fruit is "beaten" off the vine using a specialized harvester. The floating fruit is then corralled and loaded onto trucks for delivery to a receiving station. Wet harvested fruit is used for a variety of processed cranberry products including juice and sauce.

Due the proximity of cranberry beds to wetlands and lowlands and the striking visual nature of large acreages of floating bright red fruit during fall harvest, there is the general misconception that cranberries require large quantities of water to grow and are aquatic in nature ie. grown in water. This is not the case. Cranberries grow and are rooted in either peat, sand, mineral soil and/or sawdust /woodchip substrates that are drained by a subterranean drainage pipe infrastructure to ensure their root systems can grow and thrive at field capacity soil moisture. The crop will not thrive in flooded conditions; the roots need oxygen in order to remain healthy. This drainage system in turn is connected via ditch or pipe system for tail water recovery, returning water to a reservoir that is the source of irrigation water.

Cranberry beds are generally located next to large quantities of available surface water sources in order to access water for the facilitation of wet harvest operations. Water is transferred to reservoirs that in turn pump water to the field to be flood harvested. This is where large quantities of water are required for the short harvest period. This water, once in the cranberry farm system is recycled, pumped from field to field to facilitate harvesting by a series of interconnected pumps, ditches and drains. Upon completion of harvest, water in excess of that able to be contained by reservoir scan be released back to the surface source.

It should be noted that cranberry operations in the lower mainland are located "near the end of the pipe" when it comes to sources of water required for operations. Water is diverted from surface sources (with appropriate license registration) to reservoir storage systems in the spring for flower-bud frost protection and in the fall for fruit frost protection and flood harvesting. The spring and late fall are generally periods where water is available in excess of crop demands for most conventional field crops, periods where drainage is more important than water availability.

In addition, the majority of cranberry crop production systems are closed loop systems; i.e tail water recovered from irrigation and frost protection applications are recovered and returned to on site reservoirs. These reservoirs occupy sizeable land base and are able to store, recycle and re-circulate significant amounts of water, aiding conservation efforts and supporting best management practices.

The following text is a brief response to the goals and proposed options as outlined in the Discussion Paper. We anticipate increased consultation in conjunction with the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) as the Water Act Modernization process moves forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

GOAL 1: PROTECT STREAM HEALTH AND AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTS

The BCCGA is in complete agreement of the necessity to protect stream health and aquatic environments.

This process must rely on effective governance, interpretation of laws and management between many levels of government, be it federal, provincial or municipal. By its own listing, the discussion paper lists nine pertinent provincial Acts and/or regulations overseeing potential threats to stream health. They include:

- ***Environmental Management Act, Environmental Assessment Act, Fish Protection Act, Drinking Water Protection Act, Water Act, Forest and Range Practices Act, Public Health Act, Municipal Sewage Regulation, Sensitive Stream Regulation***

These Acts are subject to interpretation and enforcement by different Ministries but mainly the Ministry of Environment.

This list does not include federal Acts or regulations that producers are mandated to follow and fall under the jurisdiction of DFO, EC and CFIA.

More rules and regulations are not required regarding the protection of stream health; what is required is a more stream-lined (no pun intended) approach and coordination between government agencies to reduce the amount of red-tape and confusion that reduces agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

Objective One

Environmental flows are considered in all water allocation decisions to protect stream health

- A. Environmental flow recommendations should be considered as guidelines, from which the decision maker may deviate in certain circumstances; clear justification must be provided for any deviation and applicants could appeal decisions.

Objective Two

Watershed –based water allocation plans include environmental flow needs and the water available for consumptive use

- A. The development of water allocation plans should be optional

Objective Three

Habitat and riparian area protection provisions are enhanced

As mentioned earlier, there is a myriad of regulations and provisions surrounding this and the status quo should be maintained but streamlined. Also, riparian habitat requirements are open to interpretation. The author has had experience where DFO was mandating the establishment of a stream side riparian zone (requiring the planting of various species of trees) on an agricultural site bordering the Salmon River intended to emulate “historic riparian habitation”. Historical photographs of the area dating back 100 years showed that the area was originally a flood plain and devoid of trees.

GOAL 2: IMPROVE WATER GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Options for improving water governance

A. CENTRALIZED APPROACH

- Keep status quo with water users responsible to report actual water use and declare compliance with water license conditions;

B. SHARED APPROACH

- Delegates specific water use to partner institution such as regional district or municipality to improve local visioning and shared decision making for water;

A combination of the above two approaches may be workable and in fact already exists within some jurisdictions. For example, farmers operating in Delta and Richmond have a good working relationship with the municipality in accessing and draining water for agricultural operations through the coordination of flow levels in the municipality’s network of ditches. Timely communications with water controllers and farmers ensure adequate water and/or drainage is applied depending on circumstances such as time of year, unanticipated and anticipated natural flow events (torrential rain; low tidal flows).

GOAL 3. INTRODUCE MORE FLEXIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE WATER ALLOCATION SYSTEM

OBJECTIVE ONE: Water allocation system emphasizes and encourages efficiencies in both water use and the administration of water as a natural resource

Whatever option or combination of options listed below that are considered, the binding or connection of existing water license to the ALR or agricultural production of the site in question should be maintained. This principle was missing completely from the eight overall principles stated at the beginning of the discussion paper. Food security is at stake. This should be maintained regardless of the current production or lack of production of the site and its water license; changing economic and international/global market conditions and supply chains mandate that prudence be administered.

Options to encourage water use efficiency:

- A. Government determines actual needs
- B. Codes for efficient infrastructure and practices for different sectors developed;
- C. Use of incentives and economic instruments; ie. Penalties and bonuses
- D. Review rules for the transfer of apportionments of existing water rights

Options to encourage administrative efficiency

The unique nature of cranberry cultivation warrants that option E. be considered. Water issues and priorities in the lower mainland differ significantly from the Okanagan and vice-versa.

- E. Permitted uses defined and allowed under the Act in accordance with regulations; Regulations may be applied **differently** throughout the province based on risk, or if considered acceptable, defined and applied through a water allocation plan;

Options to encourage administrative and water use efficiencies

To improve decision making times and enforcement, existing water license holders and applicants may potentially be responsible for:

- F. Providing more detailed information about the proposed use and efficiency measures for license applications or changes;

By requesting more detail at the initial time of application, regulators have the opportunity to learn more about the sector/nature of the applicant and possible efficiencies, where economically feasible.

OBJECTIVE TWO

Flexibility provided to water users and decision makers to quickly adapt to changing environmental, economic and social conditions

Options listed under this category should be based on sound science.

OBJECTIVE THREE

The water allocation system integrates the management of groundwater and surface water resources where required in problem areas.

Options for the water allocation system**A. FITFIR**

A modified FITFIR approach should be considered, again with the emphasis on food security and agricultural food production.

OBJECTIVE FOUR

Water users will be required to conserve water during drought or when stream health is threatened

Options to address temporary water scarcity:

Options considered under this category should take into consideration all water users, with human and agricultural needs taking priority.

GOAL 4: REGULATE GROUND WATER EXTRACTION AND USE

8.2 Possible Solutions

In this section of the Discussion Paper the first statement is: "Water, whether a stream or in the ground, will be considered the same resource under the modernized *Water Act*." Does this mean that all withdrawals from surface sources will be treated the same as groundwater, monitored and required to be metered as suggested many times in this Chapter of the discussion paper?

In this area we support the BCAC's Water Policy for Agriculture.