From: ***PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS REMOVED***
Sent: Saturday, June 05, 2010 3:55:27 PM
To: Living Water Smart ENV:EX
CC: Trevena.MLA, Claire F LASS:EX
Subject: Water Act revisions

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People:

Please accept this as my submission in relation to the proposed amendments to/replacement of the current BC Water Act.

There is little doubt but that it is timely that the government(s) take control of groundwater. The province, for decades, has avoided that responsibility for some obvious, and some obscure reasons. The Federal govermnment has never proclaimed the Canada Water Act. Access to and use of groundwater is becoming increasingly controversial and problematic, and aquifers are both depleting, and being contaminated as we speak. We were told, when the NAFT Agreement was settled, and approved legislatively, that bulk water exports from Canada were not covered by, or available, or prohibited under that Agreement. Now, that appears to be in some doubt, but is, in any event, being ignored.

But my first point is a question: what is the real purpose of the current initiative? Your project synopsis states the goals in laudable, but ephemeral terms. For example, "Introduce more flexibility and efficiency into the water allocation system" could be interpreted in several ways: one of those could be to streamline authorizations for the export of bulk water to the United States, where security of supply is fast becoming an unattainable reality. If that is the real goal here, you should be aware that public opinion will not likely support such a goal.

The Economist magazine recently spoke loudly about the general subject of water ("For Want of Drink" May 22nd issue, Special Report, pp 1-20); you should archive that Report for consideration in any final recommendations to your Minister and Cabinet. If you can't find it, please ask, and I'll copy and fax it along. But I digress.

In that same issue of that magazine, in the United States section (p.52) there is an article entitled "Liquid Gold" and subtitled "The Great Lakes Water" which highlights my concern in this particular regard: The whole article deals with problems arising with the Great Lakes Compact in which the subject matter is huge diversions of water from the Great Lakes for US states and cities. Not one mention is contained in that article about Canada, half-owner of those Lakes, as having any part to play in the "Great Lakes Water Wars" (not my phrase, but the title of a book cited in the article). That absence is, of course, not curious; Canada is largely irrelevant to the USA; until they run out of water, that is. Then there will be a real water war, and we will be faced with huge and generational decisions. The authorization of such exports by any government in Canada will likely be the beginning of the end for our current political and bureaucratic systems. What is our federal government doing about that drawdown? Absolutely nothing.

The Special Report itself also contains scant reference to Canada - perhaps arguably the world's largest "owner" of fresh water. Groundwater withdrawals, largely for their major agribiz industry, have accelerated hugely over the past half-century. California is a major participant, as we all know, in those withdrawals. The groundwater is not being replaced; some of it was untapped for milennia until the 20th C. Some aquifers are now more than 400' below datum, and losing the battle to recharge. I could go on here, but I think the point is made.

That Report also (@p.10) highlights that the most effective water manager in the world is, perhaps, Singapore. Small, and somewhat autocratic, perhaps (I lived there for two years during the past decade) there are things done in that small nation-state that you should be including in your website, and in your considerations for change. Why, for example, can we not require the recycling of industrial and commercial water by the user, as opposed to permitting its dumping, willy nilly, with toxicants still in place, into the marine and other environments? Why do we prohibit grey water discharges from residential developments, when those can easily be put to positive use - watering lawns and gardens, washing vehicles, for eg? We seem to have a double aversion to the matter of water: first, the attitude of mind that "we'll never run out"; and second, the idea that once water has been used, it is the same as waste - garbage, I mean. We recycle some wastes, and turn them to effective purposes. Why not water?

My second point is more pressing. We are experiencing drawdowns in our aquifers as well. The Water Rights Branch, some years ago, drilled monitoring wells on many of the lower Gulf Islands in an attempt to establish baselines and usages. What have the results of that monitoring been? There was to have been an extension of that monitoring to the north Gulf islands - Quadra, in particular. That hasn't happened, apparently, so let me give you a microcosmic scenario. I live in a small subdivision - 22 lots only, on the water (Discovery Passage) side of Whiskey Point. This subdivision is served by an Improvement District, the only function of which is to...provide domestic water to owners/users of those lots. The subdivision was completed and lots first sold in the very early '70's. The ID was created somewhat after the fact in the mid-80's. The community was served by a single well, of some 240 feet in depth, producing, arguably, 8 gpm. A holding tank, then of 10,000 imperial gallons was placed on the top of the Point, to provide backup. That tank was increased to 15k gallons five years ago. It still runs almost dry several times during July and August.

As the years progressed, development within this subdivision "progressed"; at first, cottages on the beach for a few lots, one or two "permanent" residences, and the rest undeveloped. Then the McMansions began to arrive, all with hot tubs, jacuzzi tubs, and one a fresh water swimming pool of around 20,000 gallons capacity. In summer, the system began to struggle, and the tank is now frequently so low that informal restrictions have to be applied. Which are, of course, routinely avoided by residents of Campbell River, for example (which prohibits the washing of vehicles at all times) with second residences here, who bring their big trucks and cars here to wash them. Well you should ask: the ID employs no staff, has no enforcement mechanisms in place other that a polite telephone call, and generally prefers to look the other way. Until the tank runs low.

But then, in 2001, a strata subdivision was authorized by local and regional agencies of governments - of about 40 lots in extent - on the rise and top of Whiskey Point. The lots were to be serviced by common wells - usually one well for each two lots. All of those wells were drilled, some to depths of 400' or more, into the same aquiifer as is our poor little straw. Over the decade, building first began, and then accelerated. There are now 17 homes up there; all are large homes, with a multiplicity of water uses. That aquifer was noted by the BC Ministry of Lands, Forests and Water Resources (of the day) in the late '50's as arising uphill from Whiskey Point, and from rain and snowfall only, and thus of limited recharge capacity. It has been drier over the past three years than in the previous 15 here. If drier is our legacy of global warming, then I forsee shortages, probably chronic in the immediate future.

The point is, to be blunt, that governments should not be approving small-lot

subdivisions without first examining how the reasonable domestic water needs of the owners of homes in those subdivisions are going to be met. There is current consideration being given by the Strathcona Regional District for densification of land use in Quathiaski Cove (where this subdivision and ours are located) but no one seems to be paying attention to where the water for the 500 "new" homes which that densification subtends is going to come from. The Local Government Act, and other provincial statutes contain no clear jurisdiciton, or guidelines in that regard. What of amendments to those? It serves no good purpose, in sum, to authorize subdivisions with no data as to the source, capacity, recharge, and otherwise of the domestic water supply to those.

That is a problem that you can address in your recommendations: amendments to the Local Government Act to require local governments and the Health Act, to require health authorities to in turn require developers to obtain and provide details of domestinc water supply in advance of any apopoval of a plan if subdivisiion.

I trust that the foregoing may be useful.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Yours truly,

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