

From: Jef Keighley

Sent: Saturday, February 05, 2011 10:05 AM

To: ***PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS REMOVED***

Subject: ACTION ALERT: Stop the Introduction of a Water Market in the BC Water Act!

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Please send this out far and wide.

Thank you.

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February 5, 2011

Dear Friends:

Please READ THIS ARTICLE from the Council of Canadians - SEND A LETTER to express your views - ACT TODAY!

Clean water is our most precious resource and all people should have an absolute right to access clean water as a basic human right. But instead of fighting for the rights of citizens, the Gordon Campbell's government is attempting to sell off BC's water to private corporations under the guise of updating the BC Water Act. If this is allowed to happen, it will potentially put Canada's water up for grabs under NAFTA and other international trade treaties, which would give transnational corporations more effective control of our public water than BC residents or Canadian citizens. This is wrong and it must not be allowed to happen!

I know you all get tons of email asking you to write letters on various subjects and all too often we either don't have the time or just plain forget to write until its too late. **Please take the time NOW to write an email to Ian Graeme and/or write to the living Water Smart blog via the hyperlinks in the article below.** Ian is the Manager of Water Strategic Initiatives at the BC Ministry of Enviroment, Water Stewardship Division. You may also wish to copy your local MLA.

Your great, great grandchildren will thank you!

In solidarity,

Jef Keighley
Co-Chair, Sunshine Coast Council Of Senior Citizen Organizations.

PS. We should never give control of our public water resources to private corporate interests for any price, now or in the future! But to illustrate just how shallow government claims of 'benefits' can be, let me add the following historical vignette.

When then Premier Bill Vander Zalm (1986 - 90) wanted to allow 6 bulk water export licenses to companies such as Western Water, Snowcap and Sunbelt, the government claimed significant benefits would flow to BC. When pressed to articulate the so-called benefits the government was very coy. After extensive digging through government documents, press releases, etc. most of which attempted to conceal the actual amount of the so-called 'benefits', claiming the need for contract confidentiality, I was able to discern that the total license fees, for all 6 water licenses, would have amounted to approximately \$35,000 per year! No, I didn't forget a couple of zeros... the total fees would have amounted to approximately \$35,000 annually, less than a pittance! Had any of those licenses proceeded, it would have constituted an absolute giveaway of our public water resources with the so-called benefits not even enough to pay a single public employee to responsibly monitor and/or account for the process of giving away our precious resource! And it would have meant potentially permanent loss of the control of those water resources due to the straightjacket provisions of international trade agreements. Thankfully a moratorium was placed on all 6 licenses, which prompted Sunbelt Water of California to sue the Canadian government under Chapter 11 of NAFTA for \$105 million dollars claiming lost profits due to the BC moratorium. While Sunbelt's suit was eventually dropped, its example stands as a stark warning to any Canadian government level to be ever vigilant when it comes to protecting our public water for the public good, for now and and forever!

ACTION ALERT: Stop the Introduction of a Water Market in the BC Water Act!

The recently released framework for the Modernization of the BC Water Act released by the BC Government proposes to introduce water markets, also called "tradable permits" to allocate water licences in the province. Randy Christensen, Staff Lawyer with EcoJustice, recently highlighted this concern in his blog post titled "BC's water to be sold to the highest bidder?" (link: <http://bit.ly/fzwkNT>).

The implications of such a framework are very serious. This would essentially remove regulatory control over the allocation of water and instead allow for allocation priorities to be determined a market and purchasing power. Communities and various levels of government would be prevented from prioritizing social and environmental needs over corporate interests.

The proposal would allow for water users who currently hold a licences to sell it to the highest bidder on an open market. Whoever purchases the licence may be able to change what the water is used for, potentially setting up a situation where water currently being used in agriculture winds up being used in a hydraulic fracturing operation. Worse yet, the proposal talks about creating "a more flexible system ... by reducing the government decision making burden and streamlining requirements." In other words, creating a deregulated market for BC's water.

The Technical Background Report (link: <http://bit.ly/eTiEtG>) released by the province reinforces the need for residents of BC to be alarmed. The report suggests that a water market "has the potential to reduce the role of regulators in reallocations" and "may even create incentives for further withdrawals in overburdened systems." The report also acknowledges that the use of economic instruments such as water markets "requires careful attention to such concerns as restrictions under free trade agreements and social equity considerations." However, no information is provided as to how trade agreements such as NAFTA and the Canada-EU **comprehensive economic trade agreement (CETA)** currently being negotiated would impact water allocation on a deregulated market in BC.

*** For more info of **CETA** visit: <http://www.canadians.org/trade/issues/EU/index.html>

The Modernization of the Water Act is increasing focusing on "economic efficiency" rather than prioritizing a regulatory framework that can prioritize ecological needs and equitable access ensuring the human right to water. A water market will prioritize economic rights over human rights allowing corporations involved in water bottling, hydro-fracking, private "ruin-of-the-river" power projects, and mining operations to proceed unchallenged with abusive use of water resources due to their vastly superior financial ability to purchase licences on a deregulated market rather than apply for them through a government regulated process.

ACT TODAY!

A new provincial Water Act is expected to be introduced in 2012. Tell the BC Government that you do not want the introduction of a water market to allocate water in the new Water Act. Ask the government to support an allocation system that provides hierarchy of use prioritizing ecological and social needs.

1) Though the ability for resident's to engage has been significantly limited in recent months you are able to engage with the process by posting to the "Living Water Smart" blog: (<http://blog.gov.bc.ca/livingwatersmart/>) or email ian.graeme@gov.bc.ca.

**** The "Living Water Smart" blog has responded to the EcoJustice blog suggesting that water markets would not privatize water. A water market clearly removes public control over the allocation of water use for existing licenses. When a particular watershed has reached a maximum number of licences based on capacity all future decision of allocation would be left to the market.*

2) With the political uncertainty surrounding this process it is extremely important to raise this issue during the leadership races of all the political parties and to demand that candidates make a commitment to preventing a water market from being introduced in any future legislation. Contact your local MLA today and make sure that all leadership candidates make their position clear.

For more information or to get involved in organizing against the introduction of a water market in BC please contact the BC-Yukon Regional Office of the Council of Canadians:

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