



Water Sustainability Act
Ministry of Environment
Water Protection and Sustainability Branch
PO Box 9362
Stn Prov Gov
Victoria BC, V8W 9M2

The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) is appreciative of the opportunity to comment on the proposed Water Sustainability Act. We believe this is a key piece of legislation that will move the province towards progressive standards and practices around the management and protection of a vital public resource – water.

The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities is the longest established area association under the umbrella of the Union of BC Municipalities. The area association was established in 1950. It now has a membership of 51 municipalities and regional districts that stretch from the Central Coast Regional District down to the tip of Vancouver Island and include Powell River and the Sunshine Coast. The Association deals with issues and concerns that affect large urban areas to small rural communities.

The membership of the AVICC, and other local governments in B.C. through the Union of BC Municipalities have voiced their concern over drinking water protection through watershed management on private managed forest lands through various resolutions. Water quality standards have become strengthened under the *Drinking Water Protection Act*, and as the primary owners and delivery agents of community drinking water systems, local governments are under increased pressure to protect drinking water sources. However, on Vancouver Island where private forestland makes up 23% of the land base, it has become increasingly difficult to meet the legislative standards in place for drinking water quality. Furthermore, the removal of large tracts of private managed forestlands from Tree Farm Licenses further exposes community water systems to risk through the loss of protection previously afforded through the designation of Community Watersheds. The potential for adverse impacts to both ground and surface water quality and quantity through industrial forest activities is significant, and therefore, should be of paramount importance when new legislation is passed to protect water sources in the province.

Industrial forest activities are heavily regulated and managed on Crown Land in B.C. through the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, which provides for a more integrated approach to water quality protection on public land. The Act authorizes regulations that set objectives for water protection and which must be adhered to by forest and range agreement holders. It also enables the designation and protection of Community Watersheds, which are watersheds that are sources of drinking water. Forest operators are required to meet drinking water quality objectives set by government for Community Watersheds. The primary tool identified for implementing regulations on the landscape is the Forest Stewardship Plan, which requires water quality values be considered, along with other resource values.

Industrial forest activities on private managed forestlands which are regulated under the *Private Managed Forest Land Act (PMFLA)* are not subject to the same stringent requirements of the *Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA)* that seek to protect community drinking water. The majority of Vancouver Island communities draw drinking water from an active working forested watershed. Under the *Private Managed Forest Land Act*, logging companies are not required to submit long-range forestry plans, therefore we believe there is a lack of oversight on industrial forest activities that may adversely impact watersheds that are a source for local government drinking water systems. Furthermore, under the *PMFLA*, there is a restriction on local government authority regarding uses of private managed forestlands. The authority granted to local governments under the *Local Government Act* and the *Community Charter* which assigns substantial powers to local governments to influence stream health through their role in land use planning, zoning, approval of developments and establishing bylaws is restricted on lands and activities regulated under the *PMFLA*.

The AVICC would like to see the proposed Water Sustainability Act address the following:

- Legally binding Water Sustainability Plans should be mandatory for private managed forest lands that fall within a watershed that has been identified as a source for a community drinking water system;
- Establish mandatory requirements to consult with the pertinent local government on Water Sustainability Plans when the area in question has been identified as a source for a community drinking water system;
- Local governments and other key stakeholders who have a vested interest in the protection of water sources, should be consulted on the development of the legislative language and supporting regulatory framework for the Water Sustainability Act;
- Local governments should be empowered and resourced to manage threats to drinking water sources.

We believe that these measures would start to address the challenges we have outlined with regards to protecting community water system sources located on private managed forestlands in B.C.

Sincerely,



Larry Cross, President
Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities