



## **Submission to the Water Sustainability Act for B.C. Legislative Proposal**

November 22, 2013

---

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed new water legislation.

The BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) is the province's umbrella farm organization. We are a council of commodity groups and, through our members, represent 14,000 of the 20,000 B.C. farm families who, in turn, generate 96 percent of the farm gate receipts in British Columbia. Agriculture is the third largest resource sector in the province, playing a significant and important role in the provincial economy overall.

### **Introduction**

The agri-food sector generates almost \$9.6 billion in revenues, directly employing 61,000 people and creating an additional 237,500 agriculture-related jobs through wholesaling, retailing and food service. The entire BC agri-food value chain represents 14% of the provincial workforce, generating over \$37.3 billion in revenue.

As a major provider of jobs and secondary business opportunities, BC agriculture is a significant contributor and stabilizing factor in many of the province's regional economies outside of urban centres. The Importance of agriculture was recognized by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities which voted in 2009 for an agriculture exemption from the Carbon Tax with the rationale that "a strong agriculture sector providing a secure food source is essential to support the residents of British Columbia..."

Agriculture's true contribution is often overlooked because of the unique nature and scope of this important industry. In addition to the economic benefits, BC agriculture provides a number of other societal benefits, such as rural community sustainability, community involvement, open spaces for recreation and tourism, and investments to encourage environmental sustainability.

Access to a stable and affordable water supply is critical for the sector and for sustainable future growth.

P: 604.854.4454  
T: 866.522.3447  
F: 604.854.4485

230-32160 SOUTH FRASER WAY  
ABBOTSFORD BC V2T 1W5

*Leading the Way Together*  
**bcac.bc.ca**

## Specific Comments

Our review of the Water Sustainability Act for B.C. Legislative Proposal, released October 2013 raised the following comments:

### Priority of Rights

- Thank you for recognizing that “First in Time, First in Right” (FITFIR) is a viable model for prioritizing water access in BC. We have seen no evidence that FITFIR leads to inefficient water use. Through education and voluntary participation the agriculture sector has seen considerable investment in innovations to reduce the impact on the environment.
- Applying the same regulations to ground water and surface water, such as FITFIR, will aide users understanding of the new legislation and help with implementation.
- Thank you also for recognizing that water storage works for agriculture will not be included for critical environmental flows or natural stream flows.
- In situations where a surface water licensee relinquishes rights in exchange for nearby ground water licence; that the licensee’s priority (FITFIR) be transferred to the new ground water licence.
- In parts of the province significant volumes of water are purveyed to farms via municipalities or regional governments. While not directly part of this legislation, we request that the Provincial Government work with regional governments to ensure that municipality supplied water to agriculture during times of scarcity ensures adequate water supplies for livestock and safe food supply.
- The establishment of a Agriculture Water Reserve (AWR) is a critical concept for a long term sustainable food system. There must be a process for the Agriculture Sector in a region to lead establishing an AWR.
- When innovation and investment by the sector leads to improved water efficiency, the “excess” water must be reserved for future agriculture uses.
- In times of scarcity, animal welfare and food production should rank in priority after Environment Flow and Essential Human Needs and before other licensees.
- Retention of the Environmental Appeal Board is very important aspect in the proposed Act.

### Pricing

- Differentiating water rent rates between agriculture, industrial, commercial and domestic must continue.
- While some industrial water users (such as BC Hydro) do not affect the volume of available water, some of the revenue generated by the Province from these users should be included to offset the water act administration costs. i.e. these revenues should offset some of the administration costs.
- Effective implementation of the WSA will require adequate resources, staffing and funding by the Ministry of Environment. As the benefits of the proposed WSA apply to all BC residents, not just the licensees, some of the administration costs should be covered by all citizens through general revenues.

#### Implementation /consultation

- The Agriculture sector is very appreciative of the engagement by the Ministry of Environment leading up to this proposal. Specifically we want to acknowledge the efforts of Ted White and Randy Cairns.
- Enacting the new water act will be only the first step of the process; many details will be contained within regulations. To ensure that the regulations are effective, both for the Ministry and the sector, we expect an ongoing engagement process as regulations are developed.
- While agriculture sector groups have been very engaged with MoE in development of the proposed legislation, many rural water users are not connected with our groups. We recommend that the Ministry of Environment, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture and commodity associations conduct a series of regional town hall meetings to speak to the new Act and how it will be implemented, prior to the legislation being introduced in the Legislature.

#### **Conclusion**

The BC Government has identified the Agri-food Sector as one of the key economic drivers in the province. The government has also identified a goal of growing output from this sector from \$10B to \$14B in the next four years.

World leaders have also identified that feeding a growing world population will require food producers to expand and innovate. As climatic conditions become more volatile, farmers will need access to a stable and affordable supply of water if we are to help grow BC.

Respectfully submitted,  
The British Columbia Agriculture Council  
Lorne Hunter, Water Sustainability Committee Chair