



Water issue urgent

May 19, 2007

Time for a national water strategy

Worth Repeating, May 16.

Water security is the most pressing issue of the 21st century. Yet Canadians, and our political leaders, continue to struggle under the myth of water wealth, convinced that the proverbial well will never run dry.

The threats to Canada's water security are mounting – global warming, water exports, invasive species and the looming spectre of scarcity – we see the evidence all around us.

What we need is action from our federal government, not rhetoric. In the recent budget, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty referred to a "national water strategy" as the context for a limited set of initiatives including funding for Great Lakes cleanup and fisheries science.

Although we recognize the value of each of the items, they certainly don't come close to adding up to a national strategy. In fact, by far the largest investment is directed toward six new vessels for the Coast Guard, which has very little to do with freshwater management.

The federal government has had a comprehensive federal water policy in place for 20 years but it has never been implemented. This federal water policy needs to be reinvigorated and acted upon to build a foundation for a truly "national" water strategy.

The path to a true national water strategy is a dialogue among all levels of government – federal, provincial, territorial, aboriginal and municipal – water use sectors and civil society.

The federal government doesn't deserve a seat at the table of a national strategy until it has shown a commitment to act in areas that are clearly within its constitutional and jurisdictional responsibilities. Action priorities must include:

- legislating a Safe Drinking Water Act.
- ensuring access to clean water for First Nations.
- requiring water conservation for infrastructure renewal.
- clearly prohibiting bulk water exports.
- rebuilding capacity for world-class water science in Canada.

Ads by Google

HouseValues

Wondering what your home is worth?

- fully enforcing the Fisheries Act to protect aquatic ecosystems.

Oliver M. Brandes, University of Victoria, B.C., **Tim Morris**, Sierra Club of Canada, Toronto