

Water for Sustainability - A Canada-Wide National Water Strategy

Canadians in general expressed concern and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, through this resolution, expresses their concern how best to deal with "significant pressures" that Canada is facing on its water resources. The past several years have provided us with numerous examples of the need for a Canada-Wide National Water Strategy. The floods, the droughts, the Great Lakes pollution problems, the waterborne infectious diseases, the issue of water exports, the variability of our climates and the impact of man's activities on that climate all speak to the need for a coordinated effort between the federal, provincial and municipal governments to develop a Canada Wide Strategy to guide local and National practices and policies for one of our most precious resources. For over a decade, leaders and leadership groups from across Canada have been identifying severe problems with our management of water and calling for the development of a durable Canada-wide Water Strategy. The multiple issues of concern, and the interactions and overlaps among jurisdictions and issues are often cited as the reasons for seeking such an overarching strategy - a strategy that will establish a collaborative vision and comprehensive set of management principles for water.

There is recurrent recognition that Canada's approach to water management lacks coordination. The diffuse responsibilities for protection of water lead to conflicts and gaps. An overarching framework will facilitate the wise management of water into the future by providing agreed principles and enhancing the coordination of action plans that address the highest priority issues. Effective local and watershed-specific management decisions will result with consequent overall cost savings.

Governments, industries and non-government organizations are working on water strategies and plans within their own jurisdictions (and some are taking leadership outside of that) but there is as yet no single place or position that guides the future for our nation's water resources. There is emerging consensus that these efforts alone are inadequate to ensure the future security of water in Canada. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) have recently included a quest for a National vision for water in their work plans which is an excellent start, and the next step will be a strategy which must involve all stakeholders in the country.

There are other efforts that span jurisdictions based on shared beliefs and attitudes about our responsibilities towards water - such as those of religious groups in general and some national as well as provincial NGOs. So the need for coordination comes from more directions and has at least as many routes for potential success.

Towards this end, and to sustain Canadian quality of life, healthy water quality and economic well being, the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) has circulated "Sustainability Principles" for Water Resources management. (CWRA.org) In addition, CWRA has also created a roadmap report titled "*Toward a Canadian National Water Strategy*" illustrating a feasible method to develop a Canada Wide Water Strategy. (The de Loe report)

Historically and economically, Canada has been shaped by our waterways and water infrastructure. The benefits that we have derived from water are diverse. Canada has more lakes than any other country. We have more water per capita than any other large country. Unfortunately we tend to take water for granted and undervalue it. Canada's per capita water use is among the highest in the world, twice as much as the average European.

Despite the fact that Canada possesses 9 percent of the world's fresh water supply, Canada is not necessarily a water rich country. Viewed globally, Canada's land mass is proportional to its water supply. Approximately 60 percent of Canada's fresh water drains north, while 90 percent of our population lives within 300 kilometers of the 49th parallel. Therefore the preponderance of Canada's fresh water is not available to the area where it is needed for economic and domestic uses.

In 1987, the federal fresh water policy was tabled in parliament. This federal policy outlined five strategies: water pricing, science leadership, integrated planning, legislation and public awareness. Since

1987 water quality has become an important issue and it should now be added as a sixth federal strategy. Although the agencies that once looked after federal water policy have been rearranged and divided among many federal departments, the need for a *comprehensive cooperative water strategy* and related policy remains with us today. There is an opportunity for standardized water policies, practices and cooperative legislation to economically preserve and protect our water resource for future generations.

The following is a quote from the report prepared by the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) and released in the summer of 2008.

“Significant threats to water resources exist across Canada. Climate change is an emerging challenge in all parts of the country, but numerous long term problems also exist, with serious implications for Canada’s environment, economy and society.

Canada does not currently have an overarching national water strategy that facilitates more effective responses to current and emerging challenges and threats. The benefits of having such a strategy are numerous. Examples include the following:

- More consistent and effective responses to concerns with national dimensions, such as water exports and climate change
- Increased accountability due to broader stakeholder participation in governance
- Enhanced environmental protection and a stronger foundation for economic productivity
- Stronger national capacity to respond to threats and crises
- Better positioning to meeting growing international expectations and obligations
- Greater public acceptance and support for water management decisions

The Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) believes that a Canadian National Water Strategy (CNWS) is an effective way to address the water management challenges we face, and that such a strategy is within reach.”

“The CWRA supported a CNWS that had the following broad characteristics:

A CNWS for Canada must be developed and implemented through the participation of all stakeholders. Indigenous people should have leadership roles. The federal government must be a full and active participant, as must all the provinces and territories. However, initial lack of participation by some provinces/territories should not preclude initiation of the process.

Common goals and principles endorsed by all participants should be at the core of a CNWS. These should be comprehensive in their scope, and should be sufficiently specific that they can guide the policies and actions of participants.”

Canada's focus of "Source to Tap" should include specific outcomes for:

1. Safe, secure drinking water.
2. Healthy aquatic ecosystems.
3. Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.
4. Knowledge to make effective water management decisions by:
 - cross ministry knowledge sharing (team approach)
 - sharing of resources
 - adoption of a watershed approach to management and decision-making

- involvement of all Canadians in managing water supplies and resources;
- increasing knowledge and understanding of water resources issues;
- increasing water conservation activities;
- allocating water resources more effectively;
- promoting healthy aquatic ecosystems;
- protecting surface and groundwater quality
- ensuring Canadians have safe and secured drinking water.

Water touches all of our lives and is a significant factor in the economy of all sectors, but good information at the federal level about the water resource base and various uses is lacking. The development of an effective water policy and strategy can only be undertaken with full knowledge of the quantity and quality of total water supply along with a consideration of water use. To the extent that the watershed approach to water resource management is adopted, so should the reporting of water sources and its uses and returns.

The Canadian Chamber fully expects the Canadian government to seek further comments and feedback from stakeholders on, further, more detailed, action plans for preservation and conservation of both surface water and groundwater quality that emerge from any consultative process.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Take a leadership role in bringing the provinces and territories together to place an urgent and high priority on water management issues in the country.
2. Reintroduce the federal fresh water strategy from 1989 as a foundation for the creation of a national water management strategy.
 - Include the Provinces, Territories, Municipalities and other water use stakeholders in the strategy development stage.
 - Obtain comments and feedback from all stakeholders in the development of detailed action plans.
3. Place a high priority on development and implementation of a reporting structure that will inform Canadians on:
 - A comprehensive inventory of the quality and quantity of all Water reserves
 - The uses by activity (e. g. residential water use, agricultural irrigation, enhanced oil recovery, power generation, etc.),
 - The quantity and quality of Water returned, if any, from the various uses.
4. Support research and data collection for proper forecasting of upstream flows and possible long-term changes which may impact activities in the areas of water management.
5. Ensure that water -- apportionment agreements do not unfairly prejudice future developments in the watershed providing the Water.
6. Commit that costs for access to expertise and financial requirements for planning, implementing and measuring are not downloaded as primary responsibilities of municipalities:

- Take a proactive role with respect to feasibility studies, infrastructure development, water supply, and conservation projects.
 - Support research and data collection for proper forecasting of stream flows and possible long-term flow changes, which may impact development activities in the areas of water management
7. Encourage the associated federal government departments to introduce a national water management strategy developed in concert with the provinces, territories and water use stakeholders.
 8. Utilize a cross ministry team approach, which would assist both the federal government and the users in their quest for consolidation of information and resources.
 9. Take an active role in communicating and promoting conservation measures (such as watershed protection) and awareness to increase the understanding of the various water management responsibilities of municipalities, irrigation districts, conservation authorities, and provinces and territories throughout the country.
 10. Work on water issues in a manner that supports and adds value to the water management activities being undertaken by the provinces [i.e. Alberta, Water for Life; Ontario, Source Water Protection etc.] via partnerships and funding support that will promote regional, place based, stakeholder-driven solutions.
 11. Strive to obtain cooperation with United States federal and state governments in these initiatives so that cross-border watersheds Canadian activities are not undermined by conflicting activities in the United States.