

FLASH SHEET #10 WATER

Municipal/Provincial/Territorial/National/International by Gracia Janes

“Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink!”

This old saying could be used by some as a doomsday prophesy, given the obvious perception of many that we have lots of water on the surface of the earth, especially in Canada, versus the equally valid reality that **even Canada risks using, polluting, and exporting too much of its precious water**. As cautioned by Francois Soulard, a researcher at Statistics Canada, in a December 4th 2003 Globe and Mail article, the country has a false sense of security, ***“ There is a possibility of running out of fresh water,...There are always potential issues with water.”***

This stark warning is very clearly supported by background material to the NCWC 2001 Update on Water and Multilateral Trade Agreements, which said:

“ With 7% of the world’s land mass, Canada has 9% of its renewable water. However 60% of this water drains north, away from the 90% of the population living within 300 kms of our southern neighbor. Canad’s water is already threatened by varying types of pollution such as: acid rain, parasites and bacteria that are not eliminated by chlorine, agricultural runoff, and, poor treatment facilities and practices. With good stewardship, Canada's water is recyclable, not renewable. Simply put, Canada is not a water-rich country.”

Given developments since that resolution was passed in Vancouver in the spring of 2001, it is timely that we update ourselves and renew our commitment to protecting and preserving Canada’s water. This flash sheet is a start, as it will draw attention to some of the ongoing (and new) local, provincial/territorial, national and international problems, and highlight where our National Council of Women of Canada policies and our own individual actions can make a difference.

NATIONAL /PROVINCIAL

All across Canada one can find results of grave inadequacies in the way we protect and conserve water on a macro scale- **water that is vital to all of us in order to survive and to our natural world - its species and eco systems.**

The most startling examples include (but are not limited to):

- * Walkerton’s water supply contamination
- * chemical spills into the St. Clair River, from which cities like Sarnia draw their water
- * massive hydro electric project dams planned for Newfoundland and Quebec, that threaten vast acreages of wilderness, including over 1000 kilometres of old growth boreal forest
- * oil explorations and development in Alberta, that assaults that province’s boreal forest
- * the plans being investigated by the US Corps of Army Engineers for the widening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, and

- * little control over (or cost for) water extraction- for sale as bottled water, or for a multitude of uses in several provinces eg.in 2003, the Swiss multinational OMYA received a permit to increase its water extraction from the Tay River near Ottawa (for its mining operation), from 1,4483 to 4,500 cubic metres daily, and then, fortunately, with a change in government , had that permission cancelled
- * threats of water diversions and bulk exports abroad. eg. Newfoundland

Fortunately NCWC has good strong policies that allow it and its Affiliates- Nationally Organized Societies, Provincial Councils and Local Councils of Women - and their members, to lobby their respective decision makers about such problems with the use and abuse of water.

For example, 2003 NCWC policy speaks against the Rupert River and Great Whale Hydro projects, and the 2000 policy (in the process of being updated to address recent changes in threats eg. exotic species) supports the 2000 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement .

As well, NCWC 2001 policy urged the Federal Government to

- a) ***“ Protect the long term supply of water for domestic, agricultural , commercial , industrial uses***
- b)prohibit the export of bulk water by pipeline, tanker, bulk carrier, or by inter basin transfer and***
- c) assert sovereignty over Canadian water resources , and ensure that multilateral trade agreements guarantee compliance with Canadian ownership and control over the delivery of vital natural resources such as water and***
- d) work with the provinces to ensure the prohibition of water exports , in order to avoid repercussions under NAFTA or any other trade agreement”***

The policy also urged Provincial Councils to urge their respective governments to:

- a) “ sign and abide by the Accord for the Prohibition of Bulk Water Removal from Drainage Basins and***
- b) prohibit the export of bulk water, surface or groundwater, from any source, by any means whatsoever.”***

Using this newly developed policy, President Catharine Laidlaw Sly wrote the Government in July 2001, stating that ***“ It is paramount in trade agreements, such as those sought by WTO, NAFTA, FTAA and GATS, that the government of Canada be able to protect its citizens....for example, in the case of the environment, such agreements must guarantee control over the delivery of vital natural resources such as water.... ”***

For its part , the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario policy as early as 1989 asked that the Government of Ontario :

“a) take immediate and strong action to identify sites of groundwater contamination and institute remedial measures; to conduct a systematic survey of the Province’s ground water

b) to inaugurate a long term ground water monitoring program and

c) to legislate and enforce strict ground water use controls.”

1997 PCWO policy asked the Government of Ontario to:

“ develop legislation for groundwater protection; allocate resources to the to the appropriate Ministries to facilitate the proposed integrated strategy for management and protection of groundwater.”

This latter issue has been addressed recently by the new provincial government as it put a halt to increases in existing water permits, and a freeze on new water extraction permits, until **a plan is in place, including an inventory and evaluation of existing groundwater resources.** This will help in preventing more Walkerton’s , and the potential extraction and export of massive quantities of water in “bottles”. As well, the government of Ontario has passed a law requiring municipalities to use full cost pricing for water; is working on the nutrient water management issue, albeit slowly; and promises to address the Walkerton Inquiries many recommendations.

NCWC still needs updated policies on forests and wilderness areas and the need for a comprehensive Canadian water policy. This will be my task in the months ahead, so that you may use all our policies to better lobby governments to stop this massive assault on our water and other natural resources.

LOCAL ISSUES AND REMEDIES

While there are many and growing cries to protect our water from export, pollution from spills and massive projects such hydro dams, **there are no headlines of note regarding an even greater cumulative impact on water- that is the threat that urbanization poses country-wide. There should be, as this is something each and every one of us can help bring to a stop.**

There are many remedies , some of them personal actions we can take. Perhaps you don’t know that in one locale, there was such intense urban development, that a stream reversed its flow And, how many cold water streams are now classified warm water streams - in Niagara there is only one remaining cold water stream and it is threatened by runoff and draw down from planned development .

What about the by- product of large urban development- waste water.? Is it flowing untreated

into water course, lakes or even oceans eg. Halifax and Victoria? In rural areas, where it should be easy to develop simple “marsh “ waste treatment systems, and to ensure that rural septic systems are inspected more regularly, often the “health problems “ caused by sewerage proliferation are solved not by better, environmentally sensitive systems, but by piped services, which in turn allow/ cause more urban development.

And, why do we need so many highways? The run off and air pollution from cars and trucks pollute our air, water and land. Of course, all of these pollutants, along with emissions from other industries and incinerators, end up in the water one way or another eg. air pollution blows long distances, lands on lakes and water courses near and far, becomes part of the water that evaporates and rises into the clouds, and then falls even further afield.

At the local and provincial level, we can all act to save water quality and quantity. But we need to understand all the linkages. Some of you may remember the 1992-95 NCWC Energy Conservation Strategy Project. In one initial talk given by a representative of Natural Resources Canada, we were asked to consider the huge amount of energy it takes to get water to our faucets. This simple example involves the huge dams, the cost of running them- ecologically as well as monetarily- the distances from source to tap, the waste of water if one runs too much , or doesn't reuse it eg. the use of a suds saver, (or better still, using a cistern to avoid piped water use) the waste of hydro to heat the water , the collection of the water and treatment in a waste water system, the pollution caused when the waste goes untreated into a river, lake or ocean; and the costs of the clean up. Then too, there is the ever increased use of water for cities that grow to big and sprawl outwards onto farmlands and forests.

All of this thoughtless overuse and abuse was summed up in a recent Globe and Mail article, which stated that “the only people that use more water per capita than Canadians are Americans. It went on to say that, the reason is that we are ***“amongst the world’s most profligate users of water because the price of water is so cheap. and that ...Canadians pay more for beer or coffee than we pay for 1,000 litres of treated drinking water (generally less than \$1 per litre.)”...*** ***“Those of us who have water metres and pay for each units of water, use an average of 269 litres of water a day, while those who simply pay a flat rate , regardless of what they use, consume 457 litres daily-70% more!”***

In that same article, some local actions were noted. For instance ***“Cochrane Alberta deferred a multimillion dollar pipeline to import water by giving away toilet dams, low flow showerheads and faucet aerators. Port Elgin, Ontario avoided a \$5.5 million expansion of its water treatment plant by spending \$550,000 on installing residential water metres and an intensive conservation program. It’s estimated that if Winnipeggers cut per capita water use by 5% per day, the city could defer construction of new facilities costing \$350 million for 13 years.”***

As we learned in our energy conservation project, there are lots of personal remedies, some very important government actions at the provincial and local levels, and some very important federal actions that must be taken. I encourage you all to think about:

* what you can do personally , for instance, SIGN ON TO THE DAVID SUZUKI 10 POINT PLEDGE by logging on to www.davidsuzuki.org (last fall I promised him that I would get many thousands of our members across Canada to do so, and I'm late- mea culpa!)

* what kind of letters you (as an NOS member, or as a Local or Provincial Council member) , or your Local or Provincial Councils (or NOS's), can write to your respective Provincial or Federal government representatives, using our National and Provincial Council of Women policies

* what you would like me to do as your NCWC Environment Convener.

Don't forget the local press, the national news media eg. Elizabeth Flemming of the Manitoba Provincial Council of Women and the Winnipeg Local Council had an article in the Winnipeg Free Press regarding agreements between the provincial government and developers and the potential for sprawl, and I had a letter in the Globe and Mail this week re the need to support our alternative forms of energy, rather than the non renewable, often pollutant and the enormously expensive forms of coal, oil and nuclear.

FINALLY -SOME CONTACTS TO MAKE:

Sierra Legal Defence Fund -National Alert -Major threats to your water - 09/03 website at www.sierralegal.org Address: 214-131 Water Street Vancouver V6B 4M3 phone 604 685 5618

The Council of Canadians 151 Slater Street, Suite 502, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3 (613) 233 2773

Great Lakes United at www.glu.org

The David Suzuki Foundation at www.davidsuzuki.org

P.S. If you need some really good background material regarding actions we can take to protect and restore water sources, just let me know and I can e mail you an excellent position paper "**Reasonable and Urgently Needed Steps to Protect Water in Canada**", (written by Dr. John Bacher for NCWC President Catharine-Laidlaw Sly, as background for her participation in ICW Triennial discussions on water last year) .