

Water board has suggestions about new water act

By Kelowna Capital News

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As a key body in water management in the Okanagan, the valley's water board would like the chance to have a look at the actual Water Sustainability Act before it heads to the politicians for approval.

That's one of a number of recommendations the Okanagan Basin Water Board will forward to the provincial government on the update of its century-old water legislation, along with some detailed suggestions for inclusion in it.

Water stewardship director for the OBWB, Nelson Jatel, told directors at Tuesday's regular monthly meeting that a workshop of members of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, a technical advisory body to the OBWB came up with a series of recommendations about the proposed new legislation, but chief among them was the need for those who will be using it, to have a look at the actual legislation before it's given first reading.

Directors even asked that chairman Stu Wells personally contact environment minister Mary Polak and natural resource operations minister Steve Thomson with the request, while congratulating the province on going ahead with the modernization.

The board will also recommend that the province dedicate adequate resources to the act, and suggest that fees be used to help recover those costs.

Land use and water decisions need to be linked, since one has an inevitable impact on the other, and they recommended that surface and groundwater be considered the same resource, since they are one.

Directors were concerned that there was mention in the proposal of one specific industry, the oil and gas industry, and they felt no industry should be singled out in legislation.

Director Don Dobson noted this is enabling legislation and what will be important is the regulations that are created to carry it out.

Director Toby Pike questioned why the public has been asked to comment on the proposal instead of the actual legislation that's being proposed.

Staff were asked to prepare a letter with their points for their submission to the minister, before the Nov. 15 deadline for comments.

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