

Central Okanagan NEWS

Positive first steps in new BC water act

by [Liz Craig](#) | Story: 111076 - Mar 15, 2014 / 12:38 pm



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The Okanagan Water Stewardship Council is reacting to Tuesday's introduction of a new water act in the B.C. legislature.

The group saying that on first glance the updated legislation appears positive, but a council committee will now analyze it and respond officially to the province in the next few weeks.

At Thursday's regular monthly council meeting in Kelowna, members discussed provisions of the new Water Sustainability Act which modernizes the 105-year-old Water Act.

"I'm very pleased to see the new legislation advanced to first reading," council Chair Don Dobson commented. "My initial review suggests that ministry staff gave serious consideration to recommendations provided by the Okanagan Basin Water Board. I'm looking forward to reviewing the document in detail."

Nelson Jatel, water stewardship director for the OBWB, read the new act prior to the meeting and outlined key provisions for council members.

He pointed out that the board's recommendation that groundwater use be regulated has been imbedded in the new act where it is treated similarly to surface water in terms of protection and use.

It also includes requirements for the protection of water to sustain the natural environment (e.g. water for fish); and provides for an agriculture water reserve (e.g. ensuring water for food crops)—two other recommendations from the Okanagan.

The concept of Water Sustainability Plans, unique to different watersheds, has been introduced, replacing Water Management Plans. These would regulate water use in specific watersheds, he added. New administrative penalties have also been introduced in the legislation, along with new enforcement provisions.

“It’s definitely moving in the right direction,” noted Jatel.

During the coming weeks, there’s a consultative period regarding water pricing, which will also be included in the new act. Jatel said the OBWB and its council will be contributing to this important discussion.

From the province’s end, dozens of other pieces of legislation will be amended to conform with the new act, and regulations governing some aspects of the act must still be written.