

NEWS

Updates on tap for 105-year-old water plan

by [Staff Writer - Vernon Morning Star](#)

posted Mar 23, 2014 at 1:00 AM

The Okanagan Water Stewardship Council's initial reaction to B.C.'s proposed water act is positive, but a council committee will now analyze it and respond officially to the province in the next few weeks.

The new Water Sustainability Act updates the 105-year-old Water Act.

"I'm very pleased to see the new legislation advanced to first reading," said council chairperson Don Dobson.

"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, OBWB water stewardship director, says 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," said 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.

A schedule to the legislation, naming protected rivers in the province, does not include any in the Okanagan. This is another issue the council has said it will take up with the province.

The council is the technical advisory body to the OBWB and is made up of members representing 26 agencies interested in water.