

THE DAILY COURIER

Tougher water laws coming, board told

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Staff

Laws are changing to better protect the province's water supply, a university professor told dignitaries at the Okanagan Basin Water Board's annual meeting.

Deborah Curran said the Water Sustainability Act is moving toward groundwater licensing, and municipal governments must be prepared.

"This will affect local governments since many communities use groundwater. Also, the regulations will impact surface-water licensing," she said in Kelowna Friday.

Water licences may be changed to benefit fish because the act recognizes the importance of "environmental flow," she said. Aboriginal rights and title have implications for water entitlements, and governments must recognize the importance of negotiating with other users and rights holders, Curran said.

"The trend for water disputes is to negotiate by having everyone cut back and develop water sustainability plans. Negotiating water use in a regional context — in the Okanagan and elsewhere — will win out at the end of the day."

Curran is a municipal lawyer and Hakai professor in environmental law and sustainability at the University of Victoria.

The water board invited her to address its theme "Shared Water, Shared Solutions" at the Rotary Centre for the Arts.

Several developments, such as population growth, new water regulations, climate change and recent court rulings recognizing Aboriginal title, have prompted new ways to approach water use, said water board executive director Anna Warwick Sears.

"It's becoming more important than ever to recognize water as a precious and limited resource," she said. "We all share in its use, whether for growing food or wine, for healthy fish and ecosystems, for drinking, and playing in."

"We must also all share in its protection. We need to find shared solutions to ensure its sustainability."