

March 23, 2009

Hon. Gordon Campbell
PO Box 9041
Station Provincial Government
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell:

Re: Making water a top priority in the Okanagan basin

The purpose of this letter is to request that the provincial government continue to make water a top priority in the Okanagan basin, and to recommend actions the Province should take to support local initiatives and achieve the goal of significantly improved water management in the basin. The recommended actions are based on three recent water-related initiatives: presentations made at the **One Watershed – One Water** conference in October 2008, and priorities identified in the **Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy** and in **Living Water Smart – British Columbia’s Water Plan**. Since many ministries share responsibility for water, we ask that actions be coordinated through a single lead agency, or through your office.

Water resources in the Okanagan are increasingly stressed by population growth and climate change. The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA), and other organizations have recognized that these pressures on water may constrain economic growth and impair the high quality of life enjoyed by Okanagan residents. Improvements must be made in the way water is managed in the valley – our environment, quality of life, and regional economy depend on it.

The CWRA is a national organization dedicated to the wise use and sustainable management of Canada’s water resources. The OBWB is a unique local government body dedicated to delivering water services, science, management and governance in the Okanagan watershed.

The CWRA and the OBWB held the *One Watershed – One Water* conference (the “conference”) in Kelowna between October 21 and 23, 2008. The aim of the conference was to bring together scientists, policy makers, First Nations, and the public to document recent progress towards improved water management in the basin, share new innovations in water science, identify issues and priorities, strengthen communication, and develop recommendations to improve water management and governance in the Okanagan. The conference attracted over 220 delegates from BC and other areas of Canada, as well as the United States. A complete record of the conference proceedings is available from the OBWB website (www.obwb.ca), and a summary of the conference is attached to this letter.

The *Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy* – a comprehensive guide to water management practices to help the Okanagan meet the challenges of climate change and population growth – was released

at the conference by the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council. The Strategy strongly complements the BC Living Water Smart plan. Schedule A outlines common action items between these two documents. The Strategy is available at www.obwb.ca.

Successful and timely implementation of actions identified at the conference and in the Sustainable Water Strategy and the Living Water Smart plan will require the expertise and authority of the provincial government. We urge the Province to provide leadership and resources to support the following high priority actions:

1. *The Province should move rapidly to develop a pilot project in the Okanagan Basin that improves groundwater regulations and requirements for groundwater monitoring.*
2. *The Province should work with local government, First Nations, and the federal government to prepare water use plans and drought management plans for all major fish-bearing watercourses in the basin.*
3. *The Province should sustain and expand its funding commitment to the hydrometric and other climate-related networks.*
4. *The Province should conduct a review of water licensing and water uses for large water suppliers in the Okanagan Basin and ensure adjustments are made to reflect beneficial use.*
5. *The Province should support improved reporting and dissemination of water use data.*
6. *The Province should secure access to water for agricultural lands by establishing an Agricultural Water Reserve that links agriculture water budget allocations to the Agricultural Land Reserve.*
7. *The Province should provide funding, expertise, and leadership for protecting water sources in the Okanagan Basin and should ensure the lands surrounding high elevation drinking water reservoirs are kept public.*
8. *The Province should ensure sufficient water is available for ecosystems and species by establishing legislation that supports conservation flows, the preservation of environmental baseflows, and the designation of Environmental Water Reserves.*
9. *The Province should work with the private sector and support communities to protect, restore, and enhance waterway, riparian, and wetland function.*
10. *The Province should support research on endocrine disrupting chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and personal care products in wastewater discharges.*

The OBWB and the CWRA would be pleased to brief cabinet members and other members of the Legislative Assembly on the Sustainable Water Strategy and other initiatives being undertaken in the Okanagan basin, and would be happy to work with the provincial government on implementing these initiatives. We request that the provincial government make water a top priority in the Okanagan, and urge you to work with key ministries to develop a coordinated plan to implement the actions outlined in this letter.

Yours truly,

Co-chairs of the One Watershed - One Water conference



Nelson Jatel
Okanagan Basin Water Board



Brian Guy
Canadian Water Resources Association

Attachments:

- Schedule A: Review of priority water science, management, and governance action areas.
- One Watershed – One Water Conference Summary
- Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy Table of Contents and Executive Summary

Cc:

Hon. Colin Mayes, MP, Okanagan-Shuswap
Hon. Ron Cannan, MP, Kelowna-Lake Country
Hon. Stockwell Day, MP, Okanagan Coquihalla
Hon. Alex Atamanenko, MP, BC Southern Interior

Hon. Tom Christensen, MLA, Okanagan-Vernon
Hon. Al Horning, MLA, Kelowna-Lake Country
Hon. Sindi Hawkins, MLA, Kelowna-Mission
Hon. Rick Thorpe, MLA, Okanagan-Shuswap
Hon. Bill Barisoff, MLA, Penticton-Okanagan Valley

Mr. Eric Foster, Chair, Regional District of North Okanagan
Mr. Robert Hobson, Chair, Regional District of Central Okanagan
Mr. Dan Ashton, Chair, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen

Mr. Stewart Phillip, Chair, Okanagan Nation Alliance
Mr. Fabian Alexis, Chief, Okanagan Indian Band
Mr. Clarence Louie, Chief, Osoyoos Indian Band
Mr. Robert Louie, Chief, Westbank First Nation

Mr. Dan Ashton, Mayor, City of Penticton
Mr. Patrick Hampson, Mayor, Town of Oliver
Mr. Stu Wells, Mayor, Town of Osoyoos
Mr. Chris Pieper, Mayor, City of Armstrong
Mr. Will Hansma, Mayor, Township of Spallumcheen
Mr. Wayne Lippert, Mayor, City of Vernon
Mr. James Baker, Mayor, District of Lake Country
Mr. Jim Garlick, Mayor, District of Coldstream
Ms. Sharon Shepherd, Mayor, City of Kelowna
Mr. Keith Fielding, Mayor, Municipality of Peachland
Ms. Janice Perrino, Mayor, Municipality of Summerland
Mr. Doug Findlater, Mayor, District of West Kelowna

Schedule A. Review of priority water science, management, and governance action areas.

Key actions recommended in the Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy and the Living Water Smart plan that require collaborative involvement by the Government of BC and Okanagan Basin Water Board include:

Water Quality

BC Living Water Smart Plan

- By 2012, all land and water managers will know what makes a stream healthy, and therefore be able to help land and water users factor in new approaches to securing stream health and the full range of stream benefits. (p 43)
- Government will work with the private sector and support communities to conserve and restore stream function. (p 57)
- Government and partners will restore ecological health to 30 km of stream between Vaseux Lake and Osoyoos Lake. (p 57)
- Wetland and waterway function will be protected and rehabilitated. Government will provide incentives for the restoration of streams or wetlands. (p 67)
- Government will improve the quality and protection of drinking water sources. (p 71)

Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy

- Provide water licences for off-stream cattle watering stations, where appropriate, to protect sensitive riparian habitat. (Action 2-1)
- Work cooperatively to protect, restore, and enhance riparian and wetland areas. (Action 2-2)
- Support research on endocrine disrupting chemicals, pharmaceuticals and personal care products in wastewater discharges. (Action 2-12)
- Create a streamlined online reporting system for water data. (Action 2-14)

Water Quantity

BC Living Water Smart Plan

- By 2012, water laws will improve the protection of ecological values, provide for more community involvement, and provide incentives to be water efficient. (p 45)
- Legislation will recognize water flow requirement for ecosystems and species. (p 45)
- Government will limit all new licences to 40-year terms in areas where there is high demand and pressure on water. (p 47)
- By 2012, new approaches to water management will address the impacts from a changing water cycle, increased drought risk, and other impacts on water caused by climate change. (p 61)
- Community development strategies will be created to recognize the importance of riparian zones in adapting to climate change. (p 61)
- Government is expanding BC's hydrometric and other climate-related networks. (p 85)

Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy

- Ensure sufficient water is available to support healthy ecosystems by establishing conservation flows, preserving environmental baseflows, and designating Environmental Water Reserves. (Action 3-1)
- Extend the date on irrigation licences to allow for irrigation later in the season (October) and allow part-season licensing to maximise the beneficial use of water. (Action 3-3)
- Ensure that sufficient potable water is available in each community for domestic, industrial, commercial, and institutional use. (Action 3-4)
- Conduct a review of water licensing and water uses for each large water supplier in the basin. (Action 3-5)
- Prepare Water Use Plans for all major fish-bearing watercourses in the basin in coordination with a basin-scale agreement that specifies responses of all communities to reservoir-level trigger points. (Action 3-7)
- Develop a Regional Water Conservation Strategy. (Action 3-9)
- Maintain and expand the network of hydrometric and climate stations operating in the basin, and establish a board comprised of governments and data users to promote and manage the network and data. (Action 3-17)
- Collect physical meteorological data on evapotranspiration and lake evaporation to validate model outcomes and derive accurate estimates of evaporative water loss. (Action 3-19)

Water Science, Management and Governance

BC Living Water Smart Plan

- By 2010, a strategy to set the direction for water science in BC will be implemented. (p 85)
- Government will publish a report on the state of our water by 2012, and every five years after that. (p 85)
- By 2012, government will regulate groundwater use in priority areas and large groundwater withdrawals. (p 49)
- Government will support communities to do watershed management planning in priority areas. (p 51)
- By 2012, government will require all large water users to measure and report their water use. (p 53)
- Government will secure access to water for agricultural lands. (p 55)
- Government will cooperate with Canada to ensure the quality of drinking water in all Aboriginal communities will meet the same provincial standards applied across BC by 2015, (p 71)
- Tools to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into information and decision making will be developed by 2015. (p 83)
- Government will continue to work towards preserving First Nations' social and cultural practices associated with water. (p 83)

Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy

- Prepare a comprehensive Water Management Plan for the basin that specifically addresses groundwater licensing and monitoring, source water protection, and basin-wide drought management planning. (Action 3-8)
- Develop a pilot project to improve groundwater regulations and requirements for groundwater monitoring. (Action 3-20)
- Develop a regional well/borehole database that includes basic subsurface information for wells and boreholes, and extraction flows and actual use records for all wells drilled in the basin. (Action 3-21)
- Change water licence structure so in-stream licences without storage pay a surcharge, which goes into a watershed storage reserve fund. (Action 3-15)
- Implement policies that support coordinated water storage by utilities. (Action 3-16)
- Establish an Agricultural Water Reserve that links agriculture budget allocations to ALR and agricultural-zoned lands. (Action 3-2)
- Partner with aboriginal people in the development of basin water management strategies. (Action 4-2)
- Create an Okanagan Water fund. Develop external and internal partners to leverage funding opportunities. (Action 4-7)