



CWRA ACRH
Canadian
Water
Resources
Association Association
Canadienne
des Ressources
Hydriques



April 29, 2005

Reference: 9-503.000

Hon. Gordon Campbell
Premier, Province of British Columbia
P.O. Box 9041
Station Provincial Government
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 9E1

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Re: Water management in the Okanagan basin

The purpose of this letter is to request that the Provincial government give water a higher priority in the Okanagan basin, and on the basis of the recommendations of delegates to a recent water conference held in Kelowna, we suggest several actions the Province should take to accomplish this objective. Since several ministries share responsibilities for water, we ask that this letter be shared with those ministries, and action co-ordinated through a lead agency or your office.

The water resources of the Okanagan valley face increasing stress due to both continued population growth and climate change. The Okanagan Basin Water Board, the Okanagan Partnership, the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA), and other organizations have all recognized that these pressures on water may constrain economic growth and impair the high quality of life enjoyed by residents of the valley. Improvements in the way water is managed must be made to sustain both the environment and the economy of the valley.

The CWRA is a national organization dedicated to the wise use and sustainable management of Canada's water resources. The B.C. Branch of the CWRA includes employees of federal and provincial agencies, academics, engineering and environmental consultants, students, and others. The B.C. Branch held a conference in Kelowna between February 23rd and 25th, 2005 entitled "Water – Our Limiting Resource: Towards Sustainable Water Management in the Okanagan". Its aim was to contribute significantly to the cause of improved water management in the Okanagan basin in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the region.

The conference attracted 180 delegates from B.C. and other areas of Canada, as well as the United States. A complete record of the conference presentations is contained in a Proceedings volume, available from the CWRA bookstore (www.cwra.org). A summary of the conference is attached to this letter. During the final afternoon of the conference, the delegates adopted a series of broad recommendations, as follows:

- A forum should be created for all those with an interest in the future of the Okanagan to develop a common and sustainable vision for Okanagan water that can be used to guide the development of public policy.
- Improved demand-side management should be a primary focus of efforts to improve water management in the Okanagan.
- Public education on water values should become a cornerstone of efforts to promote water conservation in the Okanagan.
- It should be recognized that all water (in streams, groundwater, and lakes) in the Okanagan is connected, and should be managed as a single resource.
- Water management should ensure the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems.
- Collection of the water information needed for decision-making should be a high priority, and the housing and dissemination of this information should be better co-ordinated.
- Existing organizations should more effectively coordinate water issues of basin-wide interest.
- The existing model for basin-wide governance of water (represented by the Okanagan Basin Water Board) should be improved to facilitate more effective basin-wide water management.

The CWRA recommends that the provincial government responds to these recommendations by taking action. Some specific recommended actions are listed here:

- The provincial government should play a leadership role in working with local governments, First Nations, and the federal government in developing a new governance model for integrated basin-wide management of the water resources of the Okanagan Basin;
- The Province should give high priority to determining actual water use in the basin, and to using that information in future licensing and adjustments to present licenses to reflect beneficial use;
- The Province should immediately initiate, in cooperation with local governments, a detailed tributary by tributary water supply and demand analysis that considers future water needs as defined by population projections, commitments under OCPs, potential irrigation needs, climate change, and the needs of the aquatic environment;
- The Province should declare a moratorium on the issuance of new water licenses for offstream use in the Okanagan Basin until actual water use, aquatic environment needs, and future safe water yield have been determined;
- The Province should actively encourage the adoption of uniform demand-side water management approaches throughout the Okanagan, recognizing that future needs should primarily be met by reducing demand;

- The Province should immediately announce support programs to local governments for installation of meters for all water users – the federal-provincial infrastructure program could be used for this purpose;
- The Province should move rapidly to license groundwater use, to require that well logs for all new wells be submitted to a central data base, and to establish a well level observing program;
- The Province should increase its funding commitment to the water information network (the “hydrometric network”) that provides the information upon which all water research and management is dependent, and ensure that future funding is maintained over the long-term;
- The Province should immediately commission a study to recommend the optimal number and locations of streamflow, lake level, snow monitoring, climate monitoring, and water quality monitoring stations for the Okanagan Basin; and
- The Province should initiate discussions with federal and local governments and First Nations on the need for a comprehensive basin-wide update to the 1974 Okanagan Basin Study and the development of Terms of Reference to address identified needs.

As noted in the opening paragraph on this letter, the B.C. Branch of the CWRA requests that the provincial government gives water a higher priority in the Okanagan, and requests that you work with key water ministries to develop a co-ordinated plan to implement these actions.

The Canadian Water Resources Association would be pleased to brief cabinet members and other members of the Legislative Assembly on this issue, and would be pleased to work with the Provincial government on planning and implementing these initiatives.

Yours truly,

B.C. Branch, Canadian Water Resources Association



Denis Davis

Chair, Program Committee

CWRA B.C. Branch conference: "Water - Our Limiting Resource: Towards Sustainable Water Management in the Okanagan"

Attachments: Conference Summary



Cc:

Hon. Tom Christensen

Hon. Bill Barisoff

Hon. George Abbott

Hon. John Wiesbeck

Hon. Rick Thorpe

Hon. Stephane Dion, Minister of Environment

Hon. Darrel Stinson

Hon. Stockwell Day

Senator Ross Fitzpatrick

Chair, Regional District of North Okanagan

Chair, Regional District of Central Okanagan

Chair, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen

Mr. Stewart Phillip, Chair, Okanagan Nation Alliance

Mr. Stewart Phillip, Chief, Penticton Indian Band

Mr. Fabian Alexis, Chief, Okanagan Indian Band

Mr. Clarence Louie, Chief, Osoyoos Indian Band

Mr. Robert Louie, Chief, Westbank First Nation

Mayor, City of Penticton

Mayor, City of Oliver

Mayor, Town of Osoyoos

Mayor, City of Armstrong

Mayor, Township of Spallumcheen

Mayor, City of Vernon

Mayor, District of Lake Country

Mayor, District of Coldstream

Mayor, City of Kelowna

Mayor, Municipality of Peachland

Mayor, Municipality of Summerland