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Water board says public left out

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The province's process for bringing in new legislation to replace the century-old water act is flawed, according to the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Instead of calling for feedback once a draft of the legislation is available to comment on, the province's plan is to go directly from public feedback to drafting legislation, then to taking it to the legislature for approval. Currently, the process is at the Water Sustainability Act policy proposal stage, having already gone through a public input process that resulted in draft options which aren't specific. The next four steps to introduction of legislation are all at the government level, with no public feedback stage.

OBWB director Graeme James said the City of Kelowna believed there would be time for its

input on the draft legislation, and director James Baker agreed, saying they need details on which to comment, rather than just vague policy directions.

Director Toby Pike recalled that the Parliamentary Secretary for Water Stewardship to the Minister of Environment, John Slater, who also used to head up the OBWB, committed to make time for feedback after the legislation was drafted. For instance, at this point, there's no definition of what's meant by such terms as "conservation flows," noted Pike.

Director Bernie Bauer suggested the board send a letter expressing strong support for the policy proposal, but expressing concern about the details of the actual legislation. The letter will request that a period for public feedback on the draft legislation be allowed before it goes to the legislature for approval.

The province is calling for public feedback now on its blog on proposals for the new act at <http://blog.gov.bc.ca/livingwatersmart/>.