

Agricultural Water Reserve status under discussion

By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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As long as land in B.C. is locked into an agricultural reserve, any change in the provincial Water Act must ensure there is water reserved to make that farmland viable to grow food, say farmers.

So, they are drafting a series of principles on which an Agricultural Water Reserve should be based, to present to government in its drafting of a new Water Act.

And, the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, a technical committee that makes recommendations to the Okanagan Basin Water Board, has a sub-committee discussing such a reserve and how it might impact this valley.

At last week's meeting of the OWSC, vice-chairman Ted van der Gulik reported on their discussion, including a description of the draft principles the B.C. Agriculture Council is putting together to present to government as part of the discussion around a new Water Act.

He said the principles are based on taking such priority factors as drinking water and water for fish and habitat into consideration first.

Included would be agricultural lands that are currently irrigated and those currently licensed, as well as where the licences are with purveyors; groundwater; Agricultural Land Reserve lands that are in close proximity to water; and First Nations arable lands.

Since water is required to grow food, an assured, safe, secure, affordable source of water is at the foundation of farming, he noted. Watershed management plans should be watershed based and a reserve should be based on projected needs using science, with an allowance for climate change and changing demographics.

Efficiencies achieved should remain in the reserve and groundwater should be included.

The province should continue to be the agency for allocations and licensing, although planning

should be local.

Council members questioned whether ecosystem needs were adequately considered in the draft principles and who pays for water to satisfy the needs of fish.

Water stewardship director for the OBWB, Nelson Jatel, emphasized that environmental needs and drinking water and sanitation would have to be considered top priorities.

But he noted the sub-committee's technical exercise regarding water for agriculture will likely move on to a model of the impact these principles would have on this basin, or on a particular utility's area within the basin, using the water supply and demand study completed last year.

Following that modelling, a position paper for the water board will be written, approved by the stewardship council and forwarded to the board, which is made up of board members from each of the regional districts in the basin. "It's important to get it right," he said.