

PEI Water Act Consultations

April 3, 2017

Honorable Robert Mitchell, Minister of Communities Land and Environment, and Committee Members

My name is Karen Rank, I am the Vice Chair of the Municipality of Lot 11 and Area, the coordinator for the Lot 11 Watershed Management Group and currently hold a seat on the board of directors for the PEI Watershed Alliance.

Tonight, my comments represent those of the Lot 11 and Area Watershed Management Group Inc. and the Municipality of Lot 11 and Area.

As you know, watershed groups are working across our Island to protect, preserve and enhance our province with ground level work undertaken each year. This Water Act will have a direct effect on all watersheds across the Island. As we know our water source is groundwater and we must ensure that all measures are taken to protect it, from the top down, so to speak.

This Act must insure we are equally protecting both the quality and the quantity of our water.

We have read the draft of the proposed Water Act for Prince Edward Island and I was quite impressed to see most of what was contained within it.

We found the "purposes" section to be solid, particularly:

(a) Government has a guardianship role to play in ensuring that the quality, quantity, allocation, conservation and protection of water is managed in the interests of a common good that benefits and accommodates all living things in the province, and their supporting ecosystems.

(b) access for everyone to a sufficient quantity and safe quality of reasonably affordable and accessible water for personal and domestic uses, and to basic sanitation that is safe and hygienic, is essential for an adequate standard of living.

We were happy to see

1. a plan for increased reporting on the state of our water, and
2. the ban on the export of water, also a welcome sight.

However, I do have concerns, my concerns are not what is contained within the document but with what is not contained within the document.

There is nothing in the document draft with regard to High Capacity Wells and the moratorium.

We live in an age of global water crisis. Islanders currently enjoy an adequate supply of fresh water, but it is demonstrably threatened during extended dry seasons. We must be certain that our water supply – and the public safety and environmental health that depend upon it - are not further endangered by high-capacity groundwater exploitation. We live on an island... and islands have finite, isolated water resources.

We call on our leaders to extend the high-capacity well moratorium and to create an appropriately supported workgroup of experts including scientists, watershed managers, provincial regulators, agricultural organizations, and family farmers. We must pragmatically examine the threats and develop safeguards, including monitoring protocols.

Assessment, prevention, response, and recovery are four key elements we must consider in responsible public protection and watershed management. Additionally, a clear mechanism for compensation and liability when harm is done is a duty of law. Let us create a formal dialog that centers on independent, unbiased, factual information that results in fair, safe, and environmentally-sound provincial policy and law. We must make certain that long-term public/environmental welfare will not be sacrificed for short-term, commercial-scale profits arising from unsustainable groundwater extraction.

And finally, we would have liked to have seen, even in a preamble or in the "Inside the Water Act" document, a statement on how we're going to substantially reduce nitrates and pesticides in our waterways. Islanders need and deserve clear and enforceable targets on reducing nitrates, agricultural and cosmetic pesticides, and soil erosion, and to know how these will be achieved.

I will end with this, let's make informed, collective decisions today instead of making apologies and restitutions tomorrow.

Thank You

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