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**Province of
British Columbia**
Legislative Assembly

(21)
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John Slater, M.L.A.
Burnaby-Similkameen
Parliamentary Secretary
for Water Supply and Allocation

December 17, 2009

Mayors, Councillors and Regional District Chairs:

Living Water Smart is the provincial government's plan to keep our water healthy and secure for the future. A key commitment in the plan is to consider amendments to the *Water Act* to improve the protection of ecological values, provide for more community involvement and provide incentives to be water efficient.

Over the coming months, we will be using a new *Living Water Smart* blog to encourage water stewardship in BC, share ideas and stories and celebrate our water smart successes. The blog will also be used to support dialogue on modernizing the *Water Act* and will complement a public discussion paper and a series of regional meetings to be announced early in 2010. You and your staff can access the blog at www.livingwatersmart.ca.

We recognize that water touches many aspects of local government's business and responsibilities. We will engage with you directly to gather your views and feedback on proposed policy options. We will be working with UBCM and following up with you in the New Year with details on engagement opportunities.

If you require further information please contact Ted White, Ministry of Environment, Water Stewardship Division at 250-356-2791.

I look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

Sincerely,

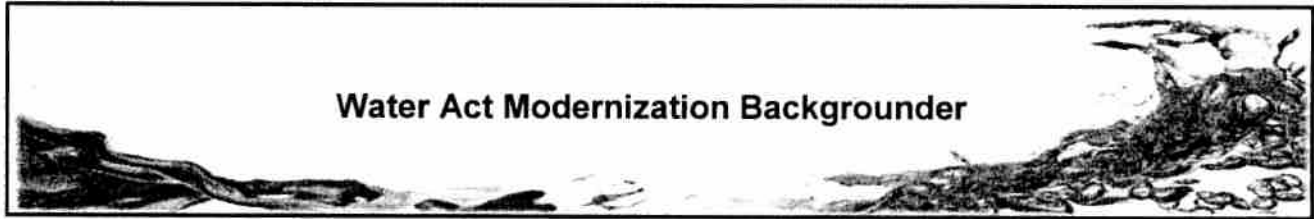
John Slater, MLA Boundary-Similkameen
Parliamentary Secretary for Water Supply and Allocation

Attachments: - Summary of Living Water Smart Commitments related to *Water Act* Modernization
- Water Act Modernization Backgrounder

cc: Honourable Bill Bennett, Minister of Community and Rural Development
Jared Wright, UBCM

Summary of Living Water Smart commitments related to Water Act Modernization (WAM)

WAM Theme	<i>Living Water Smart</i> commitment
1. Protecting stream health and aquatic environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • By 2012 water laws will improve the protection of ecological values. • Legislation will recognize water flow requirements for ecosystems and species. • Government will require all users to cut back their water use where stream health is threatened. • Wetland and waterway function will be protected and rehabilitated.
2. Improving water governance arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2012, water laws will provide for more community involvement. • Government will support communities to do watershed management planning in priority areas. • Government will improve the quality and protection of drinking water sources. • Tools to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into information and decision making will be developed by 2015. • Government will continue to work toward preserving First Nations' social and cultural practices associated with water.
3. Introducing more flexibility and efficiency in the water allocation system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2012 water laws will provide incentives to be water efficient. • Government will require all users to cut back their water use in times of drought. • Government will limit all new licences to 40-year terms in areas where there is high demand and pressure on water. • By 2012, government will require all large water users to measure and report their water use. • Government will secure access to water for agricultural lands. • Government will require more efficient water use in the agricultural sector. • 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.
4. Regulating ground water use in priority areas and for large withdrawals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2012, government will regulate groundwater use in priority areas and large groundwater withdrawals. • By 2012, government will require all large water users to measure and report their water use.



Water Act Modernization Backgrounder

1. Living Water Smart

Living Water Smart: British Columbia's Water Plan outlines government's vision and plan to keep our water healthy and secure for the future. One-third of the 45 actions in the plan either require legislative change or would be strengthened with changes to water laws. Key commitments in the plan include:

- “By 2012, water laws will improve the protection of ecological values, provide for more community involvement, and provide incentives to be water efficient”
- “Legislation will recognize water flow requirements for ecosystems and species” and,
- “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”.

2. Objectives of a new *Water Act*

The *Water Act* is the heart of the Province's water governance framework. Established in 1909, the *Water Act* is the primary water management legislation and has a key role in the sustainability of BC's water resources.

Reforming the *Water Act* is not about fixing something that is broken. Instead it is about recognizing that the context and foundation upon which the *Water Act* was built was very different 100 years ago. How can we make it more responsive for today's and tomorrow's challenges while making it simpler to understand, communicate, administer and enforce? How can it complement non-regulatory tools?

The following four objectives will be addressed as part of the *Water Act* review:

- Protect stream health and aquatic environments;
- Improve water governance arrangements;
- Introduce more flexibility and efficiency in the water allocation system;
- Regulate ground water use in priority areas and for large withdrawals.

3. Process

The *Water Act* review has four phases:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Jurisdictional Review and Scoping	Policy Development & Engagement	Legislation Drafting	Bill Introduction to Legislature
Complete	Fall 2009-Spring 2010	Fall 2010	Spring 2011

4. Schedule

- Public discussion paper – Jan 2010
- First Nations and stakeholder meetings – Winter-Spring 2010
- Legislative proposal development – Summer 2010
- Bill introduction to legislature – Spring 2011

5. Engaging with First Nations and Stakeholders

Engaging with stakeholders, all orders of government including First Nations and the public is an essential part of policy development. MLA John Slater, Parliamentary Secretary for Water Supply and Allocation will champion the public, First Nations and stakeholder engagement process, and the cross-sector dialogue on the *Water Act* modernization project throughout the fall and winter of 2009/2010.

A range of tools and methods will be used throughout the process including:

- **Online tools** including a moderated blog and website to provide regular updates on the policy development process and an open forum for discussion and comment;
- **A public discussion paper and submission process** to focus dialogue on outcomes and policy options;
- **Email notices to registered stakeholders** including invitations to register for updates on the WAM process and progress;
- **Face-to-face meetings with First Nations and stakeholders** to explore potential opportunities and implications of policy options with stakeholders from a range of sectors.
- **Cross-government advisory team** will be used throughout the process to ensure the review is coordinated and integrated across government;
- **Participation at stakeholder-hosted events** to provide information for newsletters and websites, and present at events where appropriate.

6. For more information

Water Act Modernization Project
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