

## Does Our Water Abundance Mask a Potential Challenge? The Need for a National Water Framework

According to the World Economic Forum's 2014 Global Risks Perception Survey, water security is one of the top three most concerning global risks facing the world today.<sup>1</sup> This resolution seeks to build upon the existing 2013 Canadian Chamber of Commerce resolution *Water for Sustainability – A National Water Strategy* by positing that Canada is not immune to water security risks and that our assumed freshwater endowment and fragmented jurisdictional responsibility mask potential water challenges and the need for a national water framework.

The demand for freshwater continues to rise and global water requirements are projected to be pushed beyond sustainable water supplies by 40% by 2030. Agriculture already accounts for approximately 70% of total water consumption but, according to the World Bank, food production will need to increase by 50% by 2030 as the population grows and dietary habits change. The International Energy Agency further projects water consumption to increase by 85% by 2035 to meet energy production needs. In addition, population pressures and the changing climate are only serving to compound current water demands.

An assumption exists that Canada is blessed with abundant freshwater and need not be concerned with water scarcity. However, while Canada has 20% of the world's total freshwater resources, less than half of this water is deemed "renewable", meaning that it is useful and accessible for humans. The remainder of this freshwater resource is locked away in fossil water caches such as in aquifers or glaciers.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, Canada does not have an adequate national water strategy or governing framework for our water resources. We lack a full and accessible national accounting of our existing water resource, our current water needs, and the projected water demands of the future. In addition, we have little national understanding of the cumulative impacts of our water use, including the timing and volume of water withdrawals, the speed of return flows and the quality of returning water – information necessary for governments to adequately, and fairly, assess applications by industry or agriculture to withdraw water for their operations.

As water is essential not only for human life but for the production of food, energy, and products of all kinds, it is vital that it is managed sustainably to meet future needs. The lack of a national water framework compromises our ability to manage this resource sustainably and makes industry susceptible to future water shortages or unduly aggressive conservation measures. As responsibility for water is fragmented between federal, provincial, and municipal governments and various departments and agencies,<sup>3</sup> only a governance framework of national scope that consolidates and updates existing water management strategies across the country will be sufficient to know how and why we use water in the ways we do and how we manage the resource for the future.

### Recommendations:

That the federal government work with the provinces and territories to:

1. Commission new research into water rights management, the sustainability of Canadian water resources, the potential for national water shortages and the potential impact on Canadian businesses and make this research and any subsequent resources or tools publicly available.

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<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2015*, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2015/part-1-global-risks-2015/environment-high-concern-little-progress/>

<sup>2</sup> Environment Canada website. Accessed from: <https://www.ec.gc.ca/eau-water/default.asp?lang=En&n=1C100657-1>

<sup>3</sup> National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, "Changing Currents: Water Sustainability and the Future of Canada's Natural Resource Sectors." Accessed from: <http://www.blue-economy.ca/sites/default/files/reports/resource/changing-currents-water-report-eng-1.pdf>

2. Craft a national water framework in partnership with the provinces and territories that consolidates and updates existing legislation and strategies, while respecting any existing international, inter-provincial or inter-territorial agreements, and ensures Canadians across the country and all levels of government understand:
  - the water rights management framework
  - the location and abundance of our current water resources;
  - how water is used and managed (currently and in the future) for the benefit of both human and environmental needs
  - the potential impact of climate change and anthropogenic activities on our water resources;
  - the replenishment rate and returning quality of major water resources; and
  - how to properly manage water resources to ensure it remains a sustainable resource for Canadians in the future
  
3. Incorporate consultations with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis groups, businesses and business associations, non-governmental organizations, and the public into the creation of such a national water framework

**SUBMITTED BY THE BURNABY BOARD OF TRADE**