B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting British Columbia's Community Water Supply Sources

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COMMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE DRINKING WATER REVIEW PANEL'S INTERIM REPORT

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In the context of the reasons leading to the former government's public review and legislative passage of the *Drinking Water Protection Act*, somehow left un-enforced by Order-In-Council, and the review process of that *Act* by the successive Liberal government, we believe that the recommendations in the Drinking Water Review Panel's Interim Report of December 14, 2001, for the stated protection of British Columbia's drinking water sources, and the residents and businesses that are dependent upon it, are overall progressive, and are to be commended. In this respect, there are details in the recommendations that would provide the future amended *Act*, at this stage of the Review Panel's recommendations, with greater substance, clarity, and strength.

However, we are acutely concerned over the grave historical injustice rendered to public domestic watersheds through the removal of legislative Acts for their specific protection by previous governments, which is why our water supplies are in such a questionable and deplorable state. It is at a scale and magnitude that almost defies belief, a scandal, as we see it, of great proportions. For instance, the recent profile in the Vancouver Sun newspaper of Chapman Creek, the source of potable water for the Sunshine Coast Regional District ("Thirst for logging revenue puts drinking water at risk", January 5, 2002; "Scientist disputes Hume on watershed safety", January 10, 2002). The mismanagement and utter degradation of the Chapman and Gray watersheds, under permit from the Ministry of Forests, was the equivalent of a criminal act, and there should be a full investigation to uncover the wrong-doings that were committed there to the people of the Sunshine Coast. And what of the drinking water sources that continue to entered into and degraded, to the anxiety of residents attempting to protect them, while our government ponders while writing and amending legislation?

Furthermore, our successive provincial party governments have failed to provide strict management regulations for communities which derive their water supply from privately-held lands:

> A second major deficiency of both policies as they now stand is neither of them requires the integration of land use planning on private lands within watersheds. In many cases, the uncontrolled use of private lands in a watershed can totally destroy the benefits derived from integrated planning on the surrounding Crown lands. Perhaps the Water Act should be amended and the Environment Management Act used to legally require private land owners to work through the planning arms of Regional Districts to insure the uses made of their lands is compatible with the land and water use objectives established for Crown lands in watersheds.

> It should be remembered the Water Act does not currently distinguish between Crown and privately owned lands so it is likely the best vehicle to accomplish this. (Dennis McDonald, Nelson Ministry of Environment Regional Director, June 12, 1984).

As an overall result, British Columbia communities are left to cover the financial and health-related burdens from our degraded watersheds, including measures to disinfect sources that were traditionally of the highest water quality standards. Water treatment technologies should not be the new mantra for the wholesale degradation of our drinking water sources. When we come to that point, as some have already suggested and begun to implement, then we lose sight of ourselves, and our place in life itself. This is not the time to bury our heads in the sand, but to become proactive in pursuing measures that redirect our society to legislatively value the protection of our drinking water sources.

Finally, we are gravely concerned about the possibility of future government policies which may lead to the formal privatization of Crown lands, as they relate to drinking water sources, a point we raised in 1999 in response to the Auditor General's report on Drinking Water. Granted, Tree Farm License agreements are a form of fee simple title, a point which should be carefully investigated in this respect. After all, the Forest Act legislation amended in 1960, as we pointed out in our submission to the Drinking Water Review Panel, is at the foundation of this concern. To this end, there should be legislative provisions and policies enacted to exempt the privatization of our domestic watersheds. In bringing forward the discussion of Crown Lands, we are also sensitive about the fact that much of British Columbia is on lands that are without First Nations treaties, another matter of great injustice and sensitivity.