

Nova Scotia needs to show leadership on water policy

For immediate release

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On July 20, Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter will be joining his provincial counterparts in Vancouver for the annual Premiers' Conference. What was once a cacophony of voices mostly concerned with airing grievances with the federal government, provincial premiers are now a closely knit group represented collectively in the Council of the Federation and focused on serious policy issues.

For the past year the premiers have made the sustainable supply of clean water a priority by committing to both joint and individual action. Last August the premiers signed a Water Charter recognizing their obligation to promote water conservation and quality. This Charter laid out several strategies for implementing progressive policies on water issues that many of the provinces have been pursuing. Just last month, the Council of the Federation created the Water Stewardship Council, which will be made up of government advisors from all provinces and territories and will seek counsel from non-government water experts. The Stewardship Council will help facilitate implementation of the Water Charter.

In this province, the government introduced the Water Resources Management Strategy last December to manage Nova Scotia's water resources for the next 15 years. But the Province will have to aim higher if it is to effectively embrace the leadership role that comes with Nova Scotia hosting the Premiers' Conference next summer. The Water Strategy is a good start, but the Province needs to offer more specifics on watershed management, water monitoring and quality goals, and integration of water, wetland and coastal policies.

Strong regulations – and commitment to their enforcement – are needed to back up these policies and truly protect water resources. For example, while the Province stresses the importance of protecting drinking water supplies, at any one time some 50 boil water advisories are in place across Nova Scotia and many municipal water supplies are vulnerable to contamination. Also, protecting wetlands is key to reducing run-off from the kind of storms we saw cause major flooding last fall, yet a wetlands policy, promised in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, is a year and a half overdue. Legislation, therefore, needs to encompass protection of water resources, including lakes, rivers and streams, throughout the province.

While there is a framework for action, that action has yet to emerge. Next year, when Premier Dexter hosts the other premiers here in Nova Scotia, he has an opportunity to proudly demonstrate that the Province has taken action to protect and manage water resources for Nova Scotians now and into the future.

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