



A Policy Respecting the Prohibition of Bulk Water Removal from Major River Basins in Nunavut



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Application

This policy statement applies to the surface and groundwater resources of Nunavut.

Preamble

It has been apparent for some time that Canadians are concerned about a wide range of freshwater issues. They are looking to all levels of government to work together to protect and conserve our freshwater resources.

There is a perception that Canada has plentiful water resources. The water is not, however, always where it is needed. Much of the water is tied up in ice and deep lake storage, and is not available through annual river flow. The serious problem of water scarcity and poor water quality in many countries could put pressure on Canada's water resources. From both economic and environmental perspectives, the sustainable approach is to prohibit the export of large volumes of water out of major drainage basins. Rather, Canada can promote expertise and technology related to water conservation and water treatment, so that potable water can be derived from poorer-quality sources.

Water policy should be guided by ecological measures, not economic or trade matters. In this manner, water can be protected within a major drainage basin using generally applicable water-use regulation and environmental protection measures. Removing water in bulk from a drainage basin can have negative impacts within the donor basin. It can compromise existing and future in-stream water uses, alter the ecology of water habitats, and threaten cultural values and cultural activities of residents in the basin.

The need to protect, conserve and properly use Canada's freshwater resources is recognised by all levels of government. In February 1999, the federal government proposed a strategy that would prohibit the bulk removal of freshwater from major drainage basins within federal jurisdiction. This commitment was within the forum of the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment (CCME), a body of federal, provincial and territorial parties that collectively considers environmental issues. Participants in the CCME committed themselves to prohibit the bulk removal of freshwater, for export and other purposes, from Canadian river drainage basins through the use of legislation, regulations or other policies within their own jurisdictions.

Accordingly, the Government of Canada has amended the *International Boundary Waters Treaty Act* to prohibit the bulk removal of boundary waters from Canadian basins for any purpose, including export. To further meet federal responsibilities for water management and regulation in Canada's northern territories, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is issuing this policy statement on prohibiting the removal of water in bulk from major river drainage basins in Nunavut. A similar policy statement is available for the Northwest Territories.



Purpose

All major uses of water within Nunavut require a water licence, including any proposal that contemplates removing bulk quantities of freshwater from the major drainage basins of Nunavut.

This policy statement affirms that the Minister, in order to be consistent with the Government of Canada's position prohibiting bulk water removal from major drainage basins, will not approve any licence issued by water licensing boards for that specific purpose.

DIAND has the jurisdiction for water management in Nunavut. Further, it has the responsibility to develop, in cooperation with the Government of Nunavut and the water licensing board, the best approach for the protection, conservation and appropriate utilization of Nunavut's freshwater resources.

Principles

This policy is based upon the following principles:

- water is fundamental to life and is a precious resource;
- water-based ecosystems are essential to the well-being of Nunavut residents, especially those who live a traditional lifestyle;
- the wise and sustainable use of water is critical to protect the health of ecosystems in Nunavut, and to promote environmental, social and economic well-being for present and future generations; and
- the conservation and protection of water in Nunavut, and the drainage basins from which it comes, requires the cooperation of all parties that manage water and regulate its use. This is particularly so for river basins that cross boundaries of territories and provinces.

The Statement of Policy

The removal of freshwater in bulk quantities from the major drainage basins within Nunavut is prohibited. Any licences submitted to the Minister authorizing bulk water removal will not be approved.

For the purpose of this policy the major drainage basins are i.) all rivers that flow to Hudson Bay, and ii.) all rivers that flow to the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, including the rivers on any islands within Nunavut.

Bulk water removal is defined as any water transferred out of a river basin in any individual container greater than 40 litres in volume, or removal by any means that involves permanent out-of-basin transfer, whether it is by diversion (including pipeline, canal, tunnel, aqueduct or channel), tanker or other mechanism.

For greater certainty, bulk water does not include “bottled water” in containers of 40 litres or less. Ecological impacts related to the removal from a basin of freshwater as “bottled water” are addressed through the environmental assessment and licensing practices under the appropriate statute.

In addition to the exemption for water packaged in the small containers noted above, removal of freshwater out of a drainage basin is allowed for water required: to meet short-term health and safety needs (such as fire fighting); for human or animal consumption during travel and water needed to carry foodstuffs; for road construction and maintenance; and other such local uses, in so far as these are consistent with water resource management objectives and environmental considerations.

This policy will be reviewed regularly to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the ecosystem and conservation goal through prohibiting removal of water in bulk quantities from any major drainage basin of Nunavut.



Notes
