

Independent MLAs support Fort Nelson First Nation in water conflict

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Independent MLAs Bob Simpson and Vicki Huntington are standing with the Fort Nelson First Nation in its call for thorough government consultation and investigation into the impact of long-term water licences related to hydraulic fracking in northern BC.

“In 2011 we asked the government about the public consultation process for these types of massive water withdrawals, and they assured British Columbians that there would be ‘extensive consultation, discussion, and negotiations with First Nations,’” says Simpson. “The fact that the Fort Nelson First Nation has had to go public with their concerns means this simply hasn’t happened. The NDP has also been silent on this issue, and we’d like to know where they stand.”

The long-term water licences under consideration could divert billions of litres of fresh water per year from the northeast to natural gas extraction projects. The Fort Nelson First Nation has created an [online petition](#) calling on the government to stop issuing long-term licences until it fully consults with First Nations groups.

“The government is being disingenuous when it says consultation and investigation has taken place,” says Huntington. “Last year, I asked the Minister of Environment why he had no watershed management plan for the Northeast. He said the government has delegated this job to the Oil and Gas Commission, which must justify issuing long-term water licences to its industry partners. But where is the accountability when promises of consultation are broken and cumulative impact studies are non-existent?”

The Fort Nelson First Nation’s plan for responsible water management includes: environmental baseline studies; industry development plans; environmental and industry monitoring; cumulative impacts assessment; and the ability to protect culturally significant land and water resources from development.

“They’re asking for the right things,” says Simpson. “There needs to be proper consultation, baseline studies, and investigation into the long-term consequences of the permanent withdrawal and toxification of water. We should be conserving this resource, and a proper economic valuation of water might force these companies to get serious about finding other means to extract natural gas.”

A new report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives notes that BC’s water pricing is far lower than in other parts of the country. Natural gas companies in BC pay nothing for water under short-term licences, and just \$2.75 per 2,500 cubic metres under long-term licences, compared to \$175 in Quebec.

Simpson and Huntington have both signed the Fort Nelson First Nation’s online petition. In 2011 they were joined by 21 organizations and prominent British Columbians in calling for a government review of hydraulic fracking.

The Fort Nelson First Nations petition is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/FN-fracking>