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## **Stop wholesale giveaway of water to shale gas industry or face more legal challenges**

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*For immediate release*

VANCOUVER - A rush by natural gas companies to acquire long-term rights to remove vast amounts of water from rivers and lakes must be stopped pending proper management Fort Nelson First Nation warned the BC government today.

“We are extremely concerned about a massive giveaway of water from our rivers and lakes, without any credible process identifying what the long-term impacts will be on our land, our families and on our community” said Fort Nelson First Nation Chief, Sharleen Wildeman.

There are 20 long-term water licence applications before the province that would permit natural gas companies to withdraw tens of billions of litres of water annually from rivers and lakes in Fort Nelson First Nation territory. The water will be permanently withdrawn and mixed with highly toxic chemicals for shale gas extraction. Ultimately the majority of the water will be disposed of via “deep oilfield injection”.

“First Nations are increasingly alarmed that the Clark government and industry are making decision after decision with very real long-term impacts on our land and our communities in a regulatory and scientific vacuum. It is offensive to our rights as First Nations and it demonstrates a total disregard to the ,single most important resource that we all share” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. “Water is our most precious natural resource. We have a duty to our communities and to future generations to ensure that our waters will sustain and nourish them.”

In a ground-breaking decision by BC’s Environmental Appeal Board last week, the Fort Nelson First Nation won the right under the provincial Water Act to appeal a provincial government decision awarding Nexen Inc. rights to withdraw 2 billion litres of water per year out of North Tsea Lakes. The province opposed the Nation’s legal right to do so.

“We will continue to fight all water licence decisions until the Province comes to the table with local and First Nations communities to plan how we will address this new and unprecedented rush for water in our land” Chief Wildeman said.

The Fort Nelson First Nation has actively sought to work cooperatively with natural gas companies, the Oil and Gas Commission and the BC government to address oil and gas activities in its territory, and accepts that some level of industry activity will occur. However, the Nation is demanding several reforms.

- Before water licences are issued, full regional baseline studies must be completed.
- Gas companies and the provincial government must submit multi-year pre-development plans. The plans would identify all proposed water sources, gas-well sites and other proposed infrastructure prior to any development permits being applied for.
- A mutually agreed, cumulative effects and environmental assessment processes must be in place to ensure that gas industry water withdrawals are capped at an ecologically acceptable level.
- Culturally significant land and water resources must be protected and made off-limits to industry activities.
- Lastly, industry water withdrawals and associated gas extraction activities must be subject to rigorous monitoring and enforcement efforts by an independent body.

“Failure to embrace these fundamental reforms will lead to increasing yet avoidable conflict,” Chief Wildeman said. “It is time for the province and the industry to address our longstanding concerns.”

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