

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

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

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HEALTH MINISTER'S POSITION ON DRINKING WATER SETS B.C. BACK A CENTURY

Vancouver - Last winter, the NDP government convened eleven public meetings in British Columbia on the *Drinking Water Protection Act* and received hundreds of submissions which underscored the public's concerns about the government's failure to protect drinking water sources.

Recently, Liberal Health Minister, Colin Hansen, stated his ministry is opposed to being involved in land-use planning for BC drinking water sources even though the *Drinking Water Protection Act (Bill 20)* mandates his ministry as lead agency through the appointment of Drinking Water Protection Officers. When the Auditor General's 1999 report on *Protecting Drinking Water Sources* recommended the formation of a lead agency, the Ministry of Health, with its public health mandate, was recognized as the most appropriate for the role. The history of the Ministry of Health's mandate in drinking water sources spans a century. For many of those decades, drinking water sources were set aside by federal and provincial legislation through the creation of Watershed Reserves in order to protect water quality.

"We are absolutely shocked by the government's position on an issue so fundamentally critical to the drinking water legislation and public health," says Will Koop, coordinator of the BC Tap Water Alliance. "The *Act* as previously drafted by the NDP government was barely adequate to protect drinking water sources. The present Minister's statement to the Drinking Water Review Panel indicates that the Liberal government is unwilling to enact provisions that could restrict or even stop activities, such as logging, which continue to compromise drinking water sources. This will set us back one hundred years in terms of the ability of Ministry of Health officials to safeguard drinking water."

Though *Bill 20* was passed, the NDP failed to implement the legislation through Order-in-Council before the election. In turn, the Liberal government chose not to enact *Bill 20*, and is instead in the process of revising the Act through the appointment of the new Drinking Water Review Panel.

"Despite its promises to the public, the NDP government failed to protect drinking water sources during its nine years in office", reflects Koop. "Up until now the new government has been silent on this matter. With an ideological propensity for 'liberating' Crown lands through deregulation and privatization schemes, this silence and the Minister of Health's recent statement does not bode well for communities."