

Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review Summary of Comments: Whitehorse Open House, May 2, 2013

INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of what the Government of Yukon team members heard regarding the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* during the open house held in Whitehorse, Yukon on May 2, 2013, at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. It is intended to provide a record for both those who attended the event and those who did not and is consistent with the government's commitment to an open and transparent public review process. The comments below were gathered from approximately 45 people who attended this event.

The open house shared information about the Yukon government's water management programs through panel displays and discussion. Our purpose was to collect comments on the vision, principles and goals proposed in the draft strategy as well as six priorities and the short- and long-term actions for achieving them. Attendees were also requested to "dot" the two most important items that they would like to see come out in the final strategy. The event was promoted through posters in Whitehorse, direct communication with key water stakeholders, advertising in local newspapers and on the Environment Yukon and YukonWater websites, updates on the draft water strategy's Facebook page and through Twitter.

The public review period for the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy for Public Review* runs from March 20 through June 30, 2013. For more information or to comment on the draft water strategy, please visit www.env.gov.yk.ca/draftwaterstrategy, call 667-3171 or 1-800-661-0405 X3171 or email water.resources@gov.yk.ca.

Please note the comments below are organized by the vision, goals, principles and priorities in the draft strategy rather than by the person commenting. They are not intended to be verbatim but rather to capture the main message/theme. These comments will be compiled with other comments received during the public review to form an overall engagement summary. If you attended this session and feel there are any inaccuracies in the document, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our contact information is provided at the end of this document.

Comments are presented in bulleted italic font under the topic area addressed. The results of the "dotmocracy" exercise are not presented in this document but will be considered as we develop the final strategy and subsequent action plan.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Vision

- *No fracking. Toxic chemicals forever contaminating surface and groundwater do not support water strategy vision, principles and goals.*

Yukoners have access to safe and sufficient water to meet their needs in ways that also preserve ecosystem health now and into the future.

Principles

- *No comments.*

Sustainability: Undertake actions that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

Forward-looking: Anticipate future changes in water quality, quantity and needs due to factors such as cumulative effects, climate change and population growth.

Adaptability: Promote and develop adaptive management strategies to cope with uncertainty and change.

Security: Seek to maintain affordable, adequate, equitable and reliable water quality and quantity for all Yukoners.

Stewardship: Ensure Yukon's watersheds remain intact and healthy, based on both individual and shared responsibilities.

Cooperation: Develop and promote partnerships and collaboration as appropriate in light of shared responsibilities.

Respect: Demonstrate respect for the intrinsic value of water and the values and interests of all Yukoners.

Goals

- *Ensuring clean water for people and the environment should be the highest priority.*

Water for People: Ensure accessible, safe and sufficient water for drinking and other purposes, including industrial, recreational, heritage, cultural and spiritual uses and values. Promote sustainable and valuable use of water for communities and economies for key business sectors.

- *The petroleum industry does not equal people.*

Water for Nature: Preserve water quality and quantity for aquatic health and ecosystem services while respecting the intrinsic value of water.

Water Monitoring, Knowledge and Management: Strengthen understanding, knowledge and overall management of water.

Priorities

Priority A: Better understand and manage Yukon's groundwater regime.

- *Fracking will inevitably contaminate water, therefore hydraulic fracturing in Yukon should be banned.*
- *At the least, there should be a moratorium on fracking until there has been sufficient groundwater and surface water monitoring and data collection as well as more studies and education on the matter. We need to admit we don't know all the possible consequences and until we do, we should not allow this practice in the territory. Water is our most precious resource – why are we risking it?*
- *Use of Yukon's water should not be allowed for hydraulic fracturing.*
- *Strategy needs to recognize fracking as a risk to groundwater and needs to take a "do no harm" position (i.e. the precautionary approach).*
- *Have a hydrogeologist not connected to oil and gas industry.*
- *Do anti-fracking testing that includes thermogenic and biogenic methane before any propositions for oil and gas, test ground and surface waters.*
- *Need to develop a comprehensive groundwater sampling and sample chain of custody to provide pre-fracking baseline water quality data for all Yukoners and must include testing for all fracking injected compounds, even the proprietary ones.*
- *Establish baseline data testing, water monitoring and groundwater mapping to respond to the threat of fracking. This needs to be defensible and consistent.*
- *How do we deal with groundwater supplies and aquifers that extend beyond Yukon's jurisdiction (i.e. transboundary groundwater)?*

- *Incorporate the entire hydrological cycle. For example, include glaciers, wetlands, permafrost and peatlands.*
- *Several workshops may be required in order to identify knowledge gaps and prioritize groundwater issues.*

Priority B: Maintain/improve access to safe drinking water for all Yukoners.

- *Ask the City of Whitehorse and other Yukon communities to ban hydraulic fracturing to prevent private wells from being contaminated since the government currently does not test private water wells for certain chemicals.*
- *Build culture of conservation regarding water, energy and other resources.*

Priority C: Promote the sustainable use of water.

- *A precautionary ban on fracking should be put in place until baseline data is collected and decisions can be made with the accurate information.*
- *The amount of water extraction for fracking is not sustainable – this is not “best management”.*
- *There is a direct conflict between ensuring sustainable use of water and the extraction of natural gas.*
- *Could the decision on fracking be made by a Judicial Board? Is there a way to impose a financial obligation for baseline testing on the industry prior to development of fracking?*
- *The word “affordability” in the long term action surrounding innovative technology suggests the commodification of water. This action requires more description to explain providing infrastructure, treating water and so on.*
- *The word “sustainable” should be defined in the strategy (see the Brundtland Report).*
- *Regarding “Best Management Practices” (BMPs), where these practices have not adequately safeguarded water quality, these activities (projects) should not be allowed.*
- *The BMPs aren’t strong enough; they have no teeth. However, the existing regulatory process (i.e. water licensing) puts in those mandatory conditions.*

- *Agricultural use causes contamination and we are seeing an increase in agriculture and therefore, more water contamination. This use should be recognized more than it is currently being recognized and responded to in a way that protects water. We should see if water systems are able to sustain these practices and if not, look for ways to solve the issue.*
- *Develop greater involvement of communities and schools in monitoring and use of water.*
- *Some users don't know how much water they are using; we hope they act on the honour system but it would be better to meter use as in other jurisdictions.*

Priority D: Improve the generation and use of water information.

- *Regulatory and legislative authority should be independent of the industries they are monitoring and should include proprietary chemicals.*
- *Pre-fracking baseline data required with regulatory public good is protected by providing baseline with adequate chain of custody to ensure neutral sampling.*
- *We need more baseline data collection. Not just groundwater mapping and testing, but lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and so on in partnership with First Nations, communities, Renewable Resource Councils, academic and science communities in order to develop comprehensive and robust collection programs. This needs to be done (especially) in areas where industrial development is likely so that effective monitoring can follow-up with enforcement (i.e. Stop Work capabilities).*
- *These actions are vague and weak. We need better, more robust and comprehensive baseline surface and groundwater testing designed and conducted in partnership with First Nations and communities.*
- *There needs to be more water monitoring in the territory and it needs to be made more readily available to the public.*
- *Data needs to be made available online (YukonWater), not just who to contact to retrieve the data. One suggestion about how to do this would be to hire a contractor to standardize the data which has been recorded and compile historical reports. A good example of this method is the Northern Climate Exchange.*

- *The equipment and procedures used to test water and collect data should be consistent and defensible.*
- *Ensure linkages with other/all sources of water data, such as federal, municipal, First Nation, industry and private wells.*

Priority E: Assess and improve government management programs.

- *Before proceeding with any activities (i.e. fracking) that affect water, stop and make sure that if there are negative effects, other renewable environmentally-friendly ways (i.e. wind, solar, etc.) of meeting the need for sources are thoroughly investigated. What resource does Yukon have that is more valuable than water?*
- *Does the Waters Act and Regulation provide enough regulatory authority to ban fracking as an inappropriate use of groundwater?*
- *There should be a more active role for community participation in water monitoring (for example: secondary and post-secondary institutions).*
- *There needs to be a separation between domestic water users and industrial users.*
- *There are many transboundary water interests and concerns which should be involved, contemplated and considered during this process of engagement and development of the final water strategy.*
- *Agreements which are already in place should be implemented.*
- *There needs to be an inventory of water sources, including swamps. This is a regulatory issue – waters are not defined well enough to capture certain aspects.*
- *There are monitoring programs being undertaken by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and a community impact monitoring research project at Sheep Creek. These should be looked at.*

Priority F: Plan for water needs now and in the future.

- *Yukon's water should not be wasted in fracking.*
- *Within a 5 kilometre radius of proposed oil and gas development and prior to the drilling taking place, there should be environmental (water, air, soil)*

testing and monitoring completed and a database established to collect data related to glycol, thermogenic and biogenic methane, benzene and other fracking chemicals.

- *Fracking has too many unknowns especially with groundwater conditions. Pumping water to fracture ground created potential for deep ground water to percolate to shallow groundwater or surface water sources. If we go ahead and allow fracking, we need to monitor the vicinity of the whole fracture (horizontal). It takes time for groundwater to reach the surface; therefore there is too much risk and uncertainty involved with fracking.*
- *Yukon's water should not be exported.*
- *We must create legislation that protects Yukon water from the possible future threat of bulk water export.*
- *No bulk water export.*
- *Bulk water export was a "hot topic" in the past and could be again, so we should put a ban in and prepare for future pressures.*
- *We should not just "review and adjust" monitoring networks, we need to expand water monitoring networks and map our water.*
- *Wetlands and habitats should be included as a way to protect surface waters.*
- *We need to ensure that wetlands are protected as natural filters.*
- *The strategy should link to wetland management programs. Wetland protection and wetland buffer zones are a way to protect water quality and this "ecosystem service" is a way to save costs of unnatural water treatment. For example, look to the great lakes remediation project where project costs were a direct result of not protecting riparian/wetland zones.*
- *Need to be sure that we look at ecosystems (in a larger sense) and protect and care for them.*
- *With regard to climate change and our water regimes, we need to prioritize areas which are more susceptible to climate change effects and prepare and plan for these changes in these areas. The prioritization can be done based on what we know already as a result of water monitoring in the territory.*
- *Yukon Energy and energy generation should be looked at in the strategy as they are a good source for good data management.*

General Comments

- *The deadline is too early. The Yukon government needs to know more about fracking and Yukoners' position on it. If the Yukon government is going to proceed with finalizing a Yukon Water Strategy, it needs to be clear and formidable so that the risks to water involved with fracking would make a decision to frack untenable. What happens if 'by accident' toxic waste ends up in our freshwater systems?*
- *The consultation process should continue beyond May 31st to capture the ongoing public debate as the fracking decision-making process may continue past this date.*
- *Given that Cabinet's Select Committee will not have reported back to the legislature on the future of fracking, is this deadline appropriate?*
- *Did not like the open house format – would have preferred meeting style. Further, including names on comment submissions would give more importance to the words being expressed.*
- *The strategy needs to stress the importance of protection and conservation. This could entail the inclusion of the word "conservation" in the title of the strategy.*
- *The strategy should recognize First Nations rights to water – unaltered quality and quantity.*
- *There is a gap in the strategy that should be addressed with regard to energy, and specifically hydroelectric energy. Look to Yukon's Energy Strategy.*

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received during the Whitehorse engagement session will help inform the Yukon government in the development of the final Yukon water strategy. Once this is completed, further work will be needed to prepare an action plan to describe how the short- and long-term actions will be addressed. This includes identifying departmental leads and partners as well as options, costs and timing for implementation activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Yukon government would like to thank the participants in the public review of the *Draft Yukon Water Strategy* at the Whitehorse Open House held on May 2, 2013. Your feedback was

extremely valuable and will help guide the continued development of a comprehensive, thoughtful and innovative water strategy for Yukon.

CONTACT

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