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Where Do They Stand on Water?

An election platform analysis

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About this Document

This document is intended to assist Canadian voters in evaluating the commitments of the five main federal political parties to safeguard Canada's precious freshwater. It is a non-partisan review of the parties' commitments, as evaluated by Sierra Club Canada.

Why Water

The federal government has increasingly neglected its important constitutional role in safeguarding Canada's freshwater over the past two decades. Successive governments have fostered a perception that water is an entirely provincial jurisdiction. With the increasing threats to our water brought about by climate change, it is more important than ever that Canadians elect a federal government that will take up the unfulfilled federal responsibility to safeguard both the quantity and quality of Canada's freshwater.

Methodology

We evaluated each of the parties' commitments in relation to the 7 Priority Areas and 25 Actions outlined in *Changing the Flow: a blueprint for federal action on freshwater* (October 2007, Gordon Water Group of Concerned Scientists and Citizens, www.gordonwatergroup.ca). Similar recommendations are found in *Tomorrow Today: how Canada can make a world of difference* (2008, www.tomorrowtodaycanada.ca). Both *Changing the Flow* and *Tomorrow Today* were presented to and discussed with all parties during the last parliamentary session. The two documents represent consensus recommendations reflecting the combined effort of 17 organizations, and another 18 expert reviewers.

Party commitments are taken from:

- Party platform documents
- Party responses to the Sierra Club – Greenpeace joint questionnaire on environmental issues
- Leaders' video responses to environmental questions from Tomorrow Today

Tables 1 through 7 summarize the seven Priority Areas for action from *Changing the Flow*. Each table shows the recommended Actions, the corresponding commitments from each of the parties, and the points awarded to each party. For the full text of the Action recommendations against which the party responses were evaluated please refer to the *Changing the Flow* document at www.gordonwatergroup.ca.

Points were assigned as follows:

- 0 points for not addressing the recommendation

- 0.5 of a point for partially addressing the recommendation
- 1 point for a clear commitment to satisfactorily implement the full recommendation as detailed in *Changing the Flow*

Table 8 shows each party's response to two direct questions that are central to federal water policy: how they will protect Canadian lakes and rivers against being used as dumps for toxic mining waste; and their overall commitment to a National Water Strategy.

Table 9 gives a summary of the evaluation of each party based on the points awarded in the previous tables, and ranks the parties based on the result.

Conclusions

We set the bar quite high in measuring the parties' commitments against the 25 specific recommendations in *Changing the Flow*. None of the parties fared very well as measured by the number of specific recommendations that are reflected in their electoral commitments. This is largely because even the most specific and detailed of the parties' platforms were not as specific and detailed as *Changing the Flow*.

Nonetheless there is a stark difference between those parties that have made specific electoral commitments that reflect the priority actions that are needed (Green, Liberal, NDP) and those parties that have not (Bloc, Conservative).

The direct questions we posed to the parties also reveal stark differences. Two parties (Green, NDP) did very well in addressing our questions with credible commitments. Two parties (Bloc, Liberal) fell short of what we were looking for but still made reasonable commitments that addressed our questions. One party (Conservative) failed to provide any answer to our questions.

Overall our evaluation leads to the following ranking among the political parties, from best to worst:

1. Green Party (10 points)
2. New Democratic Party (9.5 points)
3. Liberal Party (8 points)
4. Bloc Québécois (1.5 points)
5. Conservative (1 point)

Our evaluation reveals that the Green Party, New Democratic Party, and Liberal Party are all in the same ballpark in committing to actions that will safeguard Canada's freshwater. The Bloc Québécois and Conservative party have both failed to adequately address these issues.

About Sierra Club

Sierra Club Canada has been the grassroots defender of Canada's environment since 1963. We are firmly non-partisan, yet unafraid to tell the political truth. Learn more at www.sierraclub.ca

1. Enhancing National Capacity for Freshwater Protection

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Facilitate Development of a National Water Strategy	- states that Québec adopted the <i>Politique nationale de l'eau</i> in 2002, “to assure quality and availability” (0)		“[discussion of challenges] All speak to a need for renewed attention to water policy by the federal government” - indicate support for renewed commitment to 1987 Federal Water Policy (0.5)	“will implement a National Water Strategy using regulations, monitoring, enforcement and new investment, to clean up our waterways and keep them clean” “Priorities will be informed and coordinated by a National Water Council, with membership from all orders of government, First Nations, industry, research institutes and community stakeholders” (1)	“have consistently called on successive [...] governments to develop a robust National Water Policy” “funding and implementing a <i>National Water Strategy</i> ” (1)
Implement a Nested Watershed Approach					
Formalize a Process for Sharing Best Practices					
Create a National Water Fund and Audit Process				“we will invest \$400 million in a Canada Water Fund.” (0.5)	“Create a \$10 million Safe Water Fund to address issues of emerging pollutants and help communities monitor water quality” “Improve water quality monitoring by funding [...] a comprehensive Water Quality Audit, in conjunction with provinces, territories and First Nations” (1)
Score	0/4	0/4	0.5 /4	1.5 /4	2 /4

2. Responding to the Impacts of Climate Change and Energy Production

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Assist Communities in Preparing for Droughts and Floods			“Provide adequate funding for local and regional flood protection and drought management planning;” (0.5)	"A Liberal government will coordinate a National Adaptation Strategy so that all orders of government can better understand and prepare for the effects of climate change that are already inevitable." (0.5)	
Mainstream Climate Change into Water Policies			“Provide strategic climate change program funding for water conservation on the basis that water conservation results in energy savings and reduced greenhouse gas emissions;” - acknowledges “the changes in quality and quantity [...] that will occur due to climate change.” (and proceeds to list some) (1)	- acknowledges that “climate change lowers water levels and puts ecosystems under threat”, but no specific climate-related water policies are suggested (0.5)	
Work with Alberta to Implement Water Use Targets in the Oil Sands			Elements to include [as part of a binding water sharing agreement in the Mackenzie Basin]: 1. Capping withdrawals from the Athabasca River based on assessment of in stream flow needs; 2. Ensuring oil sands developers deal responsibly with polluted waters in storage ponds (largest man-made structures on Earth); and, 3. Placing a moratorium on further oil sands development (i.e. increases in annual production). (1)	- acknowledges that “the water needs of rapidly increasing energy production –particularly in the oil sands—are huge” but makes no commitment to change or regulate this (0)	- doesn’t specifically mention water use targets, but calls for a moratorium on new tar sands developments (0.5)
Strengthen the Environmental Assessment Process					
Score	0 /4	0 /4	2.5 /4	1 /4	0.5 /4

3. Securing Safe Drinking Water for All Canadians

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Legislate Enforceable Drinking Water Protection Across Canada			<p>“Replace federal guidelines for drinking water quality with binding national standards that secure clean drinking water and human health;”</p> <p>“ensuring secure, safe water supplies for all citizens with a focus on First Nations communities through establishing regulations requiring protection of drinking water at its source, public inspection of domestic water supplies and mandatory and regular drinking water testing;” (1)</p>		<p>“Will implement comprehensive new <i>Clean Water Act</i>. This will establish enforceable guidelines for drinking water quality, starting with standards for First Nations reserves, and working with provinces and territories to make sure that all Canadians have clean, safe water in their homes and communities” (1)</p>
Provide Resources for Safe Drinking Water on First Nations Reserves			<p>- mentions a focus on First Nations communities without further detail about resources to be offered (0)</p>	<p>“Will restore the Kelowna Accord, committing \$5 billion to improve aboriginal health, education and housing.” (0.5)</p>	<p>“Invest \$5 billion over five years in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. This will improve health services, help provide adequate housing, water, and infrastructure...” (0.5)</p>
Create a Comprehensive Toolkit for Preventing Water Pollution				<p>“research the impact of emerging pollutants in water on human and aquatic ecosystem health” (0)</p>	<p>“Create a \$10 million Safe Water Fund to address issues of emerging pollutants and help communities monitor water quality.”</p> <p>“Enact the New Democrats' <i>Blue-Green Algae Proliferation</i></p>

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
					<p><i>Prevention Act</i>, which addresses the biggest sources of the blue-green algae that plagues Canada's lakes and rivers"</p> <p>"establish national standards to require a minimum of secondary treatment for all Canadian municipalities" (0.5)</p>
Fund Infrastructure Renewal and Link to Multi-Barrier Protection			<p>"Provide funding to municipalities through a new <i>Water and Waste Treatment Facilities Municipal Superfund</i>"</p> <p>"Revive the InfraGuide program [...] that supported graduate internships in leading edge municipal infrastructure projects"</p> <p>"funding improvements to municipal wastewater treatment systems" (0.5)</p>	<p>"Our substantial infrastructure commitments will help our cities and communities to invest in much needed water treatment infrastructure to manage water demand and preserve a clean water supply." (0.5)</p>	<p>"Invest in new municipal water and wastewater infrastructure, and establish national standards to require a minimum of secondary treatment for all Canadian municipalities" (0.5)</p>
Score	0 /4	0 /4	1.5 /4	1 /4	2.5 /4

4. Protecting Aquatic Ecosystems and Aboriginal Water Rights

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Develop Effective Frameworks to Maintain Instream Flow Needs			- no frameworks are given, but instream flow needs are acknowledged (0)		
Improve Enforcement of Laws Protecting Aquatic Ecosystems		Pledge to “strengthen and consolidate enforcement and penalty provisions in existing environmental legislation”. No indication which legislation. Will adopt unspecified “measures to conserve more of Canada's untouched lands and waters.” However, also pledging to “reduce regulatory and other barriers to increasing our pipeline network” and to reduce “the Regulatory Burden for Northern Development”. (0)	“Enhance the capacity of federal departments and agencies to protect and restore the health of aquatic ecosystems” (0.5)	“fully exercise federal regulatory authority to stop over-contamination of waterways, especially in areas of stress like the Athabasca River.” (0.5)	"Invest more in habitat protection and salmon enhancement. We will increase enforcement by hiring more fisheries officers and updating the <i>Fisheries Act</i> ." "Deal with toxic industrial effluent by strengthening the enforcement of existing regulations" "establish national standards to require a minimum of secondary treatment for all Canadian municipalities" "Strengthen the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to ensure it deals with emerging issues such as endocrine disrupters and pharmaceuticals." (1)
Implement the National Action Plan on Invasive Species			“Address invasive species in the Great Lakes by developing stringent, science-based protocols for ballast water flushing prior to entering the St. Lawrence waterway, and funding for monitoring and enforcement of these protocols” (0.5)	“fight invasive species, such as the sea lamprey and zebra mussel” (0.5)	“Implement the <i>National Action Plan on Invasive Species</i> and ensure that acceptable treatment for ballast water is implemented and enforced.” (1)
Recognize and Respect Aboriginal Water Rights					
Score	0 /4	0 /4	1 /4	1 /4	2 /4

5. Promoting a Culture of Water Conservation

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Implement a National Education Program for Water Conservation					
Stimulate a Stronger Commitment to Reducing Water Demands in Urban Areas			<p>"Establishing regulations and product standards to promote water efficient technologies in Canada."</p> <p>"Make federal funding for urban water infrastructure contingent on water efficiency plans that include measurable and enforceable goals and objectives"</p> <p>(0.5)</p>	<p>"our infrastructure commitments will help our cities and communities to invest in much needed water-treatment to manage water demand"</p> <p>"will introduce a Water Efficiency Act, which [...] will set standards for products used in Canada and will create consumer labeling standard for water-efficient products."</p> <p>(0.5)</p>	<p>"Set mandatory water efficiency standards for appliances and begin to phase out inefficient technologies"</p> <p>(0.5)</p>
Foster Efficiency Improvements in Other Major Water Use Sectors			<p>"Shift subsidies and funding away from dams and diversions (including feasibility studies) toward comprehensive "ground to the glass" drinking water protection strategies, especially source water protection, watershed restoration and community-based water conservation and efficiency planning and programs. Review federal agricultural subsidies and develop transitional strategies to shift production away from water intensive crops toward local sustainable agriculture."</p> <p>(0.5)</p>		
Score	0 / 3	0 / 3	1 / 3	0.5 / 3	0.5 / 3

6. Preventing Interjurisdictional Conflicts and Bulk Water Exports

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Make Support for a Strong International Joint Commission a National Priority			Improve the <i>Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement</i> . (0)		"Strengthen the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to ensure it deals with emerging issues such as endocrine disrupters and pharmaceuticals." (0)
Establish a Binding Dispute Resolution Process for Interprovincial Conflicts			"Review the Prairie Provinces Water Board Master Agreement on Apportionment to ensure it is consistent with contemporary scientific knowledge and principles of social equity, efficiency and ecological integrity." (0.5)		
Prevent Bulk Water Exports and Prohibit Inter-Basin Diversions	"It is the federal government's turn to act [...] and undertake discussions with the Americans and Mexicans to exclude water from NAFTA." (0.5)	"We will work with the provinces and territories to strengthen the current ban and ensure a clear legislative prohibition on bulk water removals or export from Canadian drainage basins." (1)	"push government to strategically implement the 1987 Federal Water Policy [...] by: a) Passing Federal legislation to prohibit bulk water exports;" (0.5)	"will [...] protect Canada's water supply by standing up for Canadian control over our waters and bringing in backstop legislation to ban the bulk export of water, and taking a strong stand against risky U.S. diversions of water systems that affect Canada." (0.5)	"Ban bulk water exports from Canada by federal law" (0.5)
Score	0.5 /3	1 /3	1 /3	0.5 /3	0.5 /3

7. Developing World Class Science

Recommendation	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
Create National Water Inventories and Ensure All Major Aquifers are Mapped			“Conduct an inventory of all polluted groundwater and water bodies” (0.5)	“map Canada’s underground aquifers that supply our drinking water, so we know where our groundwater comes from and how it is affected by human activities” (0.5)	
Commit to Long-Term Investments in Strengthening Scientific Capacity			“Fulfill the need to increase science capacity [...] enhance funding for data collection and integrated information-systems on water use, availability and quality; and link research spending in the natural and social sciences to water policy goals” (0.5)	"Increase monitoring and reporting of the quantity and quality of Canadian water; research the impact of emerging pollutants in water on human and ecosystem health." (0.5)	
Facilitate Scientifically-Informed Decision Making at the Local Level				“support the on-farm and community-based fresh water development programs of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration” (0.5)	
Score	0 /3	0 /3	1 /3	1.5 /3	0 /3

8. Direct Questions

Question	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
<p>Will your party protect Canada's lakes and groundwater sources by working to ensure that no more lakes end up on the MMERs list under Schedule 2 of the Fisheries Act? (Sierra Club-Greenpeace election questionnaire: www.sierraclub.ca/national/vote-canada/2008/election-survey.html)</p>	<p>"commits to push that the regulations issued under the Fisheries Act [...] be modified so as to prohibit the federal government to transform lakes into dumps at the simple mark of a pencil." (1)</p>	<p>No response (0)</p>	<p>"has strongly opposed the dumping of toxic waste in Canadian lakes by the mining industry. In June 2008, the Green Party formally urged Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and Fisheries and Oceans Minister, Loyola Hearn, to reverse the precarious move to reclassify some Canadian lakes as toxic dumpsites." (1)</p>	<p>"supports, in principle, the attempt to replace the 138 year old Fisheries Act, however the Conservative government did not conduct the necessary formal consultations with all individuals involved in the industry. We feel that improvements can be made to the Fisheries Act; however a new Liberal government would ensure stakeholders are properly consulted and concerns with the current components of the legislation are heard." - No commitment to stop designating lakes as toxic mining dumps. (0)</p>	<p>In February 2008, MP Peter Stoffer introduced Bill C-504 to amend the Fisheries Act to prohibit the dumping of toxic mining or other industry waste in lakes (currently permissible under Schedule 2) (1)</p>
<p>Do you and your party agree that Canada needs a national water strategy and support efforts by provinces and other stakeholders to manage water resources sustainably? What issues or regions should be priorities in addressing Canada's water concerns and how will your party take action in addressing these priorities?</p>	<p>No mention of national water strategy. Bloc proposes a tripartite letter of understanding to clarify that NAFTA does not apply to water.</p>	<p>No response. (0)</p>	<p>Endorse the 1987 Federal Water Policy (did not address need for a national, rather than federal, water strategy). Priorities/actions: ban bulk exports; water conservation; better enforcement</p>	<p>Will implement a national water strategy. Priorities/actions: water treatment infrastructure; fight invasive species; research impact of new pollutants; map aquifer; increase monitoring and reporting; ban bulk water exports; invest in green infrastructure; strong</p>	<p>Though the NDP has committed in writing to a National Water Strategy, the leader did not mention it in his video response, being graded here. Priorities/actions include: a Clean Water Act; work with provinces, territories and first peoples to manage water resources sustainably; ban bulk</p>

Question	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
(Leaders' video responses to Tomorrow Today questions: www.tomorrowtodaycanada.ca/election)	(0)		of existing laws; federal water quality regulations. (0.5)	regulations. (1)	exports; funding; water quality monitoring; improve Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement; regulate water efficiency; water and wastewater infrastructure and standards; (0.5)
Score	1	0	1.5	1	1.5

9. Summary Evaluation of Party Platforms on Water

	Bloc	Conservative	Green	Liberal	NDP
1. Enhancing National Capacity for Freshwater Protection	0	0	0.5	1.5	2
2. Responding to the Impacts of Climate Change and Energy Production	0	0	2	1	0.5
3. Securing Safe Drinking Water for All Canadians	0	0	1.5	1	2.5
4. Protecting Aquatic Ecosystems and Aboriginal Water Rights	0	0	1	1	2
5. Promoting a Culture of Water Conservation	0	0	1	0.5	0.5
6. Preventing Interjurisdictional Conflicts and Bulk Water Exports	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5
7. Developing World Class Science	0	0	1	1.5	0
8. Direct Questions	1	0	1.5	1	1.5
Total Score	1.5	1	10	8	9.5