

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

February 8th, 2010

Collapse of Fraser sockeye underscores urgency of water reform *Citizens groups unite in calling for overhaul of BC's Antiquated Water Act*

VANCOUVER – Following the collapse of Fraser River sockeye stocks and a government promise to make BC's water system "the best, bar none", an unprecedented coalition of citizen groups has issued recommendations for modernizing the BC Water Act.

A total of 29 non-profit organizations have endorsed a joint "Statement of Expectations on the Reform of the BC Water Act." The statement is in direct response to the BC government's 2008 pledge to modernize antiquated water law, and offers a comprehensive set of guidelines covering surface water health, public transparency, equitable water allocation, and groundwater and stream protection.

"BC's current water management system ranks amongst the worst in North America," says Ecojustice Staff Lawyer Randy Christensen. "If these recommendations are followed that would change and BC would move from worst to first in responsible water management."

The statement is being issued on the eve of a federal government inquiry into the 2009 collapse of the Fraser River sockeye salmon. Only seven per cent of the predicted 8.7 million sockeye in the Fraser River summer run arrived, making it one of the worst years on record for both sockeye and people who depend on them.

"It's hardly news that salmon need water, or that water is becoming scarcer due to human demand and climate change", said Dr. Craig Orr, an ecologist with Watershed Watch. "Without strong rules on water use and the health of water systems, even more salmon will be in trouble in the near future."

Among the key recommendations made by the groups are for the legal protection of instream or environmental flows and a "cap" on water withdrawals to protect the physical, biological and chemical benefits of a healthy water system. Adequate water temperature and volume are also key concerns for salmon health. Higher water temperatures associated with low flows and loss of cooling groundwater is a major threat to salmon, especially those that rear young in the hot Interior regions of BC.

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