



Water Matters

ecojustice
formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund

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Strict government approach to water ‘reallocation’ decisions gets early support from environmental groups

Draft policy affirms government oversight for management of freshwater

CALGARY – A draft policy suggesting Alberta will retain strong public control of its freshwater has won the cautious support of two environmental groups reviewing it. In its current form, the draft water licence amendment policy would prevent the Eastern Irrigation District from reallocating up to 900 billion litres of freshwater to non-farming purposes. The Eastern Irrigation District proposal sparked mass public opposition when it emerged in 2007 and has since been on hold pending provincial review.

“While we would prefer that the amendment policy would prohibit any transfer of water to other users, it is encouraging that the Alberta government is now pushing back on the widescale use of amendments for this purpose,” said Barry Robinson, staff lawyer at Ecojustice.

Ecojustice, formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund, and Water Matters, formerly Bow Riverkeeper were given a sneak peak at the policy this fall to provide feedback. Earlier in the year, the two groups raised alarm bells surrounding Alberta’s water crisis after releasing the report, *Fight to the Last Drop*, which examined how water scarcity in southern Alberta is resulting in controversial water supply schemes.

If the proposed policy is any indication, the environmental groups struck a chord with the Alberta government. While it does not ban all types of non-agricultural water licence amendments as suggested, the proposed policy does significantly limit the amount of water that can be sold off to just two per cent of the original licence allocation.

Water Matters and Ecojustice support the policy in principle but have noted that the brief one-page document leaves room for broad interpretation. The environmental groups recently submitted comments to the Alberta Government asking for the language to be strengthened.

“We appreciate the need for flexibility to ensure the effective reallocation of water in a closed basin but the management of that transfer of “water wealth” needs careful oversight. We are asking the government to clarify the policy to ensure the environmental health of the rivers and the assurance of a long-term stable source of water supply for the Alberta public,” said Danielle Droitsch, director of Water Matters.

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