

Potato Board sees proposed water act as stalling tactic

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When it comes to the provincial government bringing in a water act, the head of the P. E. I. Potato Board says it makes sense.

But board chairman Gary Linkletter also said the government didn't announce any timelines to go along with it despite lengthy discussions about lifting a moratorium on deepwater wells.

"For us, the industry, it's just a stalling tactic," he said.

Recently, the provincial government announced a plan to introduce a water act that it said would ensure sustainable management of P. E. I.'s water resources. The proposed legislation will deal with areas such as groundwater allocation, discharges into fresh and marine water environments, and mandate targets for water quality.

In developing the act, the province plans to have an arm's length group hold public consultations with work on the legislation starting right away.

But one thing it won't deal with is the possibility of lifting a moratorium on high-capacity wells for agriculture irrigation until the water act and regulations are in place.

The P. E. I. Potato Board has been pushing for the province to lift that moratorium and Linkletter said there are a lot of different groups that use more water than farmers.

"We're being singled out here," he said.

Mark Bishop, chairman of the P. E. I. Watershed Alliance, said he sees a new water act as a positive because there are a lot of regulations in place that don't tie together well enough.

"It really needs to be more cohesive," he said.

Catherine O'Brien with the Coalition for the Protection of P. E. I. Water said a water act is necessary and is way past due.

"We're very cautiously optimistic," she said.

O'Brien said public consultations will be crucial and she used the recent report from Horace Carver during his review of the Lands Protection Act as an example of successful consultation.

"If they can do that with the water act that would be great."