

Public consultations will be held on proposed Water Act

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- This article was from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. (For comments and suggestions, email wemackinnon@gov.pe.ca.)



The provincial government will be holding public consultations on the proposed Water Act. The goal of the Water Act is to protect the quality and quantity of the Island's water and to ensure its supply is healthy and sustainable, now and into the future.

The consultations will be carried out by the Environmental Advisory Council.

In the meantime, the moratorium on high capacity wells for agricultural irrigation will remain in place.

The protection of water is a fundamental responsibility of government, and modernizing water laws is an important first step. Today, there is a patchwork of legislation and regulations related to water quality, quantity and management. Furthermore, there is no transparent process for decisions affecting the management of our water resources. This means the rules for water allocation can change without the public being informed. A Water Act would include a more integrated approach to decision making. The new act also will bring several pieces of existing legislation together.

The consultations will focus on several key issues. Where a particular risk is identified to the water resource, or the environment, water allocation limits could be applied. These consider local factors such as hydrogeological information; environmental needs, land use and watershed plans; existing water uses; and climate change.

The act will also be aimed at protecting streams, rivers and related aquatic environments.

Contaminants such as nitrates lead to anoxic events. Siltation of water courses has resulted in degraded aquatic habitats. Water quality targets could help frame acceptable practices in a particular watershed.

Ensuring there is enough water is a key consideration. While current predictions for rainfall do not suggest dramatic future changes, climate change is affecting the frequency and severity of storm events. The criteria used to protect streams and rivers will be set out.

The introduction of water allocation limits will provide greater security to users, and would ensure a clear process for decisions related to licensing and allocation. Water use varies with location, and management plans could be developed in consultation with local advisory groups, communities and municipalities.

Protecting water quality is critical. Drinking water is tested on a regular basis in every community served by a municipal water system. Protection efforts play a key role in preventing the spread of waterborne illnesses. More than half of Islanders depend on private wells. The provincial government offers a water testing service.

Part of a new strategy for managing water resources could be to shift to a watershed-based management approach. Local factors taken into consideration in any watershed management plan might include the competing demands for water resources. This could mean that local conditions, issues and interests could influence water management decisions.

For more information, go to gov.pe.ca/wateract/