Lax regulation of industry, under-pricing jeopardize BC's water and hydroelectricity resources: study

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(Vancouver) A new study warns that BC's water and hydroelectric resources are at risk of being depleted by industrial users, thanks to lax reporting requirements and extremely low water prices.

Released today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the University of Victoria's POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, the study identifies gaping holes in key information relating to the water that major industries use. For example, of the 31 water licences held by pulp and paper companies — large consumers of water and hydro — only one requires water metering.

"With our government actively encouraging eight new mines and three massive natural gas processing plants in BC by the end of this decade, the strains on our interconnected water and energy resources are approaching a crisis point," says lead author Ben Parfitt, CCPA resource analyst and POLIS research associate.

The study also notes that water usage fees are so low that industry has little incentive to conserve. For example, natural gas companies are setting global records for water usage in controversial fracking operations in BC, yet pay at most token fees. An Olympic swimming pool's worth of water in BC costs just $2.75, compared to $175 in Quebec.

"Many municipalities, irrigation districts and others understand the need to conserve water and energy," says co-author Jesse Baltutis, a researcher on water policy and governance with POLIS. "Where conservation is treated seriously, there's invariably a commitment to quantify what is used and to price it fairly."

"BC's water and water-derived energy resources are vital assets, but population growth, climate change, and increased water-intensive industrial activity are pushing the limits of secured access to water and energy across the province," says Parfitt. "Our report is sounding an alarm for policy-makers that we need much better governance and integrated management of these public resources."

The study concludes that the province must act quickly to protect its water and water-derived energy resources:

- Publish accurate, timely reports on all water use (no such reports exist).
- Appropriately price water and energy resources.
- Promote resource recovery to conserve water and energy resources.
- Better protect watershed lands — a key prerequisite to safeguard our water and hydroelectric resources.

"With these four basic changes, it will be easier for the province, municipal and regional governments, and First Nations to reach new agreements about how to more effectively manage our key water and hydro resources," says Parfitt.

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Download *From Stream to Steam: Emerging Challenges for BC's Interlinked Water and Energy Resources* at www.policyalternatives.ca/water-energy or http://poliswaterproject.org/publication/503.

This report is the first publication of a CCPA-POLIS collaboration examining BC's water-energy nexus. It is also part of the CCPA's Climate Justice Project, which is funded primarily by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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