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Water profits spilling into private hands: Report

Centre for Policy Alternatives calls on province to regulate industrial water use

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As water sources start to dry up due to climate change and over-consumption by a rapidly growing global population, a B.C. research body is taking action.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) released a report, *Counting Every Drop: The Case for Water Use Reporting in BC*, this week calling for the province to exercise more control over companies and industries seeking to profit from water.

Now more than ever, we need the province to commit to a Water Sustainability Act that embraces the need for transparent, across-the-board reporting of all water use, said report author Ben Parfitt, resource policy analyst with the CCPA and a research associate with POLIS.

The report cites the mining and liquefied natural gas sectors as two industries where regulation of water usage is lacking. It says in some cases the province doesn't require major industries to meter their withdrawals from lakes, rivers and streams.

It also found the government to be undercharging companies for water use, resulting in less revenue.

In the natural gas industry, the province receives \$2.75 per Olympic swimming pool withdrawn, according to the report. However, the community of Dawson Creek is charging some of the same companies \$11,000 for the same amount.

CCPA wants the province to grant one authority sole responsibility for collecting data on all water use.

A similar dispute over the privatization of water has also erupted in Ontario. Environmental groups are challenging the province's decision to change a permit issued to Nestle. The new permit removes conditions that would make it mandatory for the company to reduce its water intake during droughts something local citizens and farmers have to do.

Bottled water companies such as Nestle, Danone and Coca Cola have also been criticized for their international practices.

In villages in Pakistan, these companies dig deep into a well, leaving little for locals, and then selling it back to them in bottled water form, according to a recent documentary by Swiss filmmaker Urs Schnell called *Bottled Life*. Many in these villages can't afford the bottled water.

In Canada, there isn't much of a problem, but in some cases, it's an issue of denial of a basic human right because of the cost of privatization of water, said Ross Pink, who teaches water politics at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

The whole idea of bottling water dates back to the late 60s and early 70s when threats to water supplies and boiling

water advisories were more prominent.

The bottled water industry plays into these instances and people feed into the marketing, said Pink.

Richmond and most of the Lower Mainland enjoys clean drinking water, however other British Columbian cities haven't been so lucky, according to Down the Drain, How We are Failing to Protect our Water Resources, a new book by Ralph Pentland and Chris Wood. As of last year, the province led the country with the most active water warnings at 290. These can last for months at a time and even years.

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