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What BC Can Learn From California's Drought

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By Laura Brandes, Communications Director, POLIS Water Sustainability Project

British Columbia can learn valuable lessons from California's extreme drought and recent groundwater law reforms as it drafts its own groundwater regulations, which will have impact in communities across the province.

Released today by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and Ecojustice, the research report *California's Oranges and B.C.'s Apples? Lessons for B.C. from California Groundwater Reform* (http://poliswaterproject.org/sites/default/files/OrangesApples_FINALWeb_0.pdf) analyzes California's legislation while taking into account the climatic, social, and legal differences between the state and province.

"B.C.'s new *Water Sustainability Act* provides real opportunities to better manage groundwater use in the province," says Oliver M. Brandes, co-director of the POLIS Project and co-author of the report with lawyer Randy Christensen of Ecojustice. "By employing a proactive approach and learning from California, B.C. can avoid a crisis situation."

The Province of B.C. is currently drafting its first regulations for pumping and allocating groundwater under its new *Water Sustainability Act*. To date, it has been the only province without any groundwater regulations. Last year, California passed its new *Sustainable Groundwater Management Act* in response to an unprecedented, multi-year drought.

"There are some really rich learning opportunities from California that cannot be ignored. It's rare for two jurisdictions with this level of similarity to be undergoing such significant changes at the same time," says Christensen. "The California drought offers a genuine glimpse into what could be the future for some of B.C.'s watersheds and regions if we aren't proactive."

The new report offers a number of key findings and insights including the urgent need to begin piloting groundwater sustainability plans in critical watersheds in B.C.; the necessity for clear performance standards, timelines, and accountability for local decision-making bodies to ensure successful watershed or aquifer plans; and the importance of shared responsibility between senior government and local decision-makers who have the context and expertise to help manage water resources under clear enforceable standards and regulations.

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