



## Creating a Blue Dialogue: Canadian Water Governance into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Webinar Summary Document

### *Implementing Water Policy Strategies: Beyond the Price of Paper*

September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010

#### Introduction

The first webinar of the series focused on the changing nature of governance in Canada, with a special focus on the evolving role of civil society, the importance of effectively translating science into policy, and the need for an effective water policy dialogue that transcends regional and sectoral (and even professional) barriers.

Our first guest, Rob de Loë, discussed trends and key factors affecting Canadian water governance; namely increased government liberalization and the greater roles of non-state actors. Nancy Goucher, our second guest, discussed the critical factors required to drive sustainable water management.

Over seventy individuals participated in the online seminar.

#### Guest Speakers

**Rob de Loë** is the Research Chair in Water Policy Governance at the University of Waterloo

**Nancy Goucher** is the Program Coordinator with Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW).

#### Presentation Summaries

##### *Rob de Loë*

In his presentation, de Loë discussed water governance: the processes and institutions through which societies make decisions and take actions that affect water. De Loë emphasized that governance is critical since it determines how humans are organized to make decisions, who is involved—and in what capacity.

#### About the Series:

The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and the Living Water Policy Project have organized an online seminar series, “Creating a Blue Dialogue: Canadian Water Governance into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” about key issues facing water policy and decision making in Canada. The purpose of these webinars is to engage Canadian water policy and management experts in emerging opportunities, trends and challenges as they relate to water governance.

By offering insights into the evolving and complex concepts related to Canada’s governance framework, the Living Water Policy Project is helping to empower the water community to understand the challenges ahead and, ultimately, better manage freshwater resources into the 21st Century.

The goals of the webinars are:

- to build a stronger understanding between research and on-the-ground implementation;
- to share perspectives and expertise on the latest water issues, best practices, and policies across the country; and
- to join a network of expert practitioners and thinkers from across the country to create a more robust community that crosses sectors and jurisdictions.



De Loë discussed three main emerging trends in Canadian water governance:

**Devolution of Responsibility:** Devolution (and sharing) of governance responsibilities has led to the rise of significant non-government involvement in water management and decision-making. A wide range of actors beyond the usual senior levels of government—such as municipalities, indigenous governments, professional associations, businesses, farmers and stewardship groups—play an important role in local, regional and national water policy dialogues, and are taking action that directly affects water resources.

**Social Capital and Collaborative Governance:** Today’s leaders and policy makers often rely on, and give legitimacy to, groups within civil society to be more directly involved in decision-making. This more diversified reliance, and demands for new approaches to engagement, outreach and inclusion requires new skills and priorities —such as the management of social capital (networks, personal trust and relationships and informal connections) and a commitment to meaningful (and transparent) collaborative governance approaches. Other “new governance” challenges include the need to ensure democratic legitimacy, accountability, adaptability/flexibility, and integration across jurisdictions and sectors.

**Regulatory Measures:** Good collaborative governance is not about avoiding responsibility and co-opting groups. Collaboration does not negate the need for senior government to establish effective, science-based regulations, procedures and standards. Effective water governance requires overarching standards and regulation to ensure minimum environmental quality is maintained. It remains the responsibility of senior government to ensure pollution, water quality, and quantity standards are met.

### **Nancy Goucher**

In her presentation, Goucher stressed that water management exists in a complex paradigm where global trends—such as shifts in hydrology, climate change, and economic forces—intersect with regional cultures and social norms impacting our ability to manage water sustainability and build capacity for “good” governance. Goucher focused on three requirements to ensure sustainable water management:

**Knowledge Linkage:** As different jurisdictions across Canada begin to experiment with more devolved water governance structures and differing stakeholders increasingly become involved in the decision-making process the importance of ensuring strong knowledge linkage between science and decision-makers must be emphasized. Different methods such as educating, collaborating or consulting need to be deployed at different times of the decision-making process and are critical to ensuring stakeholders have an opportunity to insert themselves into the process.

**Civic Engagement:** In water management, the capacity of the public to respond to reliable scientific inputs and knowledge is critical. This capacity requires a well-functioning democracy, with strong civic engagement where the decision-making process is coordinated, understood (open, transparent) and perceived as legitimate.

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**Flexibility:** Effective governance requires the flexibility to capitalize on policy windows—periods of opportune time to implement a change. Whether it’s small incremental changes or a systemic reform of the system, government and stakeholders have a strategic opportunity to both utilize the policy windows, and help open them to move the agenda forward on sustainable water management. Goucher identified the increased trend in inter-agency coordination, increased public awareness, and water as a public issue as potential policy windows that we can capitalize on to bring attention to and drive the sustainable water management agenda forward.

Joining Goucher, for questions was Marc Hudon, Ralph Pentland, and Oliver Brandes who are all members of FLOW.

### Analysis of Discussion

POLIS has drawn out potential policy actions based on the content of the presentations, discussion and questions during the webinar session:

Recommended Actions	Benefits
Senior governments can support the capacity of municipalities and regions to access new science and research and make science-based policy decisions.	By providing cutting-edge, innovative research, provincial, territorial and federal governments can be better knowledge brokers while allowing local municipalities and regions to make well-informed water management decisions.
All governments and water stakeholders participating in collaborative governance should recognize the need to retain accountability and legitimacy with the public.	With attention to the design of institutions and process, accountability and legitimacy are integral to a well-functioning governance structure.
Water stakeholders should recognize the value of policy windows—the periods of time opportune for implementing change.	By acknowledging that timing is an important political consideration, government and stakeholders can capitalize on opportunities to push the water sustainability agenda forward.
Senior government should integrate water protection in municipal community plans and other land use planning processes.	For communities, attention to land use planning, community and regional growth plans, and making sustainable water management part of business-as-usual will reduce planning conflicts and redundancy.
Senior governments should acknowledge common principles with respect to a national vision for water management such as a national water strategy.	A clear national vision shared by key stakeholders will promote consistent policy .
The federal government should engage in a national water strategy.	The concentration of resources, best science and data will support an understanding of best practices and facilitate a high standard of water governance nation-wide.

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Recommended Actions	Benefits
Senior governments should create comprehensive national drinking water standards, with effective monitoring, regulation and enforcement.	National standards will provide uniformity with other industrialized countries, less discrepancy and gaps between provinces, and help assure quality drinking water for First Nations and rural populations.

For more information or to participate in future webinars, please contact:  
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