



DRAFT TELECONFERENCE
REMARKS

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CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU DROIT DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

The Ontario public and the Ontario Provincial Government have had a significant role in shaping the Great Lakes Annex Agreements. Because 25% of all Canadians draw their drinking water from the Great Lakes, water security has always been an important issue to Canadians and has been one of the most hotly debated matters of public policy among politicians and in the media. In 2004, this sensitivity led to an overwhelming public opposition to the first draft of the Annex. Canadians objected because it did not extend the ban on bulk water exports already in place in Ontario, Quebec and all of Canada to the US side of the Great Lakes. Consequently, the Ontario government made it known they were unable to support an Annex without a prohibition on diversions from the US Great Lakes States. Thankfully, we now have that prohibition for most diversions.

Our own use of water in the basin can also cause cumulative impacts and harm to the water resources. Risks of lowered lake levels will be compounded by climate change.

Ontario already has one of the strongest water management systems in the basin regulating most uses over 50,000 litres (13,800 cubic gallons). However, there is still a long way to go to have all jurisdictions achieve this level of protection. We feel this draft of the Agreement is just a first step on a long path to preventing our own wasteful water use in the basin. We are gratified that Annex provisions are flexible and allow for strengthening in the future.

Constitutional barriers mean that the provinces cannot enter into legal agreements across borders. However, Ontario will still be bound to the Annex. Work is already underway to alter the Province's Water - Taking and Transfer law to include Annex obligations.

Ontario has conducted research that has confirmed their sense of urgency that the time to act is now before continental water crises occur. Their research concludes that population and political power shifts from the Great Lakes Region to the water-short US southwest will escalate over the next several decades.

The Annex Agreements to be signed next week could deter future crises. These Agreements will certainly send a strong message to others in North America to live within their own water budgets and will encourage better long-term sustainable water planning in other regions outside the Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Basin.

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