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OTTAWA— Canada's abundant fresh water supply is off limits, warns Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon.

Living up to a 2008 promise, the Conservative government introduced the Transboundary Waters Protection Act, which strengthens prohibitions on bulk removal of Canada's water outside the country.

"Canada's fresh water is essential to the well-being of our nation. It is our lifeblood and Canadians want this resource safeguarded," Cannon told a new conference Thursday.

Every so often a proposal comes forward to sell bulk water to the more arid areas of the world. And as time goes on the water shortage in the southern U.S. continues to grow.

"Quite simply, it belongs to Canadians, and with this bill, the government of Canada will continue to ensure that is protected, and held in trust for generations of Canadians to come," he said.

The new act would strengthen existing protections by bringing waters within federal jurisdiction under a more comprehensive prohibition against bulk water removals. Rivers and streams that cross international borders would receive the same protection already in place for waters, such as the Great Lakes, that straddle them.

The bill "complements the provincial legislation already in place ... we are strengthening our resolve to make sure there are no exports of bulk," Cannon said. He noted the bill would give Ottawa new powers of inspection and enforcement and introduces fines of up to \$6 million for corporate violations.

Maude Barlow, chair of the Council of Canadians and global water activist, said the bill is "very good beginning." But she urged the federal government to clear up a

loophole in NAFTA that under certain circumstances could turn bulk water into a commodity.

"NAFTA still has the possibility, if one provinces disobey the federal law, of extending the notion of water as a commodity," said Barlow in a telephone interview from Cannes, where she is promoting the Canadian film *Paani*. It's the first major motion picture dealing directly with issues of water justice and scarcity.

Barlow said there is a "big push" by the Economic Institute of Montreal for Quebec to export its water.

Among other things, Barlow has served as senior advisor on water to the president of the United Nations General Assembly and is also the bestselling author or co-author of 16 books, including the international best seller *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis* and *The Coming Battle for the Right to Water*.

"We also need a full new Water Act to protect water in many, many other ways," she said. "This the first step of a very badly needed set of legislation on water. Our Water Act is 40 years old."

Cannon said the only exception to the bulk water prohibition would be to fight forest fires across the border.

Joe Cressy, campaign coordinator for the Polaris Institute, a left-leaning think tank, said the bill is based on an earlier Senate bill, "which leaves some fairly striking loopholes that allow corporations to continue exporting Canada's freshwater."

"It appears the bill will continue a provision that allows for up to 50,000 litres of water a day to be exported in packaged form," Cressy said in an email. "In other words, Canada will export its water resources in the form of bottled water in daily large quantities."