

## Panel calls for greater profile for water concerns

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Local geographer Cathy Conrad worries about lake and river quality in Nova Scotia, but she also knows that a fifth of the world's people don't have safe water to drink.

It's important that fish swim in clean water, Ms. Conrad said Tuesday night at Saint Mary's University while taking part in a panel discussion on water issues in Nova Scotia. "But how do you reconcile those concerns?" Ms. Conrad asked the more than 90 people who attended the talk. "Forty per cent of the world's population don't have access to safe and clean toilets."

The geography professor returned recently from a trip to Gambia, where she witnessed first-hand the problems of inadequate drinking water and toilets.

"There are First Nations people in this country who don't have access to clean water," local activist Tamara Lorincz said during an interview after the discussion.

A member of the Nova Scotia Environmental Network, Ms. Lorincz said Canada must develop a national strategy on water.

"We don't have a good baseline understanding of our water resources . . . and we don't have a plan for dealing with the (environmental) changes we know are coming in water."

The federal government has to work closely with community groups, municipalities and the provinces in securing the country's water resources, she said.

People must also take individual responsibility and act in ways that are ecologically sustainable, said Lisa Kretz, an environmental ethicist and panel member.

This past weekend, Ms. Kretz said, she was in Yarmouth working with a group of fishermen and trying to impress upon them the importance of bringing their waste ashore.

"They know that plastics are bad," Ms. Kretz told the group. But many lobster fishermen discard their empty bait boxes into the sea, thinking that since "it's cardboard, it'll break down," she said. "But all our actions add up."

The panel discussion was part of the Halifax university's Sustainability Week events. Student Laura Simms, who organized the talk, said as part of the week's activities, students will be running a taste test comparing tap water with purchased bottled water.

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