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Coalition urging Dexter Government to act on water issues

(Halifax) - A broad-based coalition of organizations in Nova Scotia is using this year's World Water Day (March 22) to urge the Dexter government to act on a number of water issues.

The '**Turn on the Tap and Ditch the Bottle**' coalition says there are three things the provincial government can do in the short term that don't cost money and will protect Nova Scotians' right to clean, safe water:

1) Start working toward the implementation of a ban on the sale and provision of bottled water in all provincial government facilities, where tap water is available, while reinvesting in water and wastewater infrastructure.

CUPE Nova Scotia President Danny Cavanagh says the coalition will also be filing a Freedom of Information request to find out how much money the province spent on bottled water over the last five years. "There is simply no excuse for using bottled water where perfectly good tap water is available," he says.

2) Conduct a review of water extraction by bottled/spring water companies in this province that would uncover quantity extracted and evaluate this with the protection of aquifers as a priority.

Jocelyne Rankin of the Ecology Action Centre says, "Groundwater aquifers aren't limitless underground pools we can pump dry. Groundwater is inextricably linked to surface water and over-pumping could cause dramatic declines in water levels, affecting wildlife habitat and recreational and fishing opportunities. We need to make sure enough water is allocated to meet the needs of the ecosystem before we start giving carte blanche to multinationals like Nestle and Coca Cola."

3) Adopt a 'Right to Water' Bill.

"As water is essential to the health and welfare of Nova Scotians, the use of water must be managed as a public resource for the benefit of all people," says Angela Giles of the Council of Canadians. "The Government of Nova Scotia can enact a Right to Water bill to protect the public distribution of water and establish an Office of the Right to Water, among other things." (More details on this bill to come.)

Kenn Stright of KAIROS says, "As a Faith-based organization we see water as a gift and a human right. It is as important to us as the air we breathe and the food we eat."

The coalition is made up of the following organizations: Ecology Action Centre, CUPE Nova Scotia, The Council of Canadians, KAIROS Halifax, Polaris Institute, Canadian Federation of Students – Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Environmental Network, Oxfam Canada: Maritimes, Clean Nova Scotia and Hydro Heroes.

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