

## Presentation to Regional District of Nanaimo

Feb. 25, 2019

Directors and staff of the Regional District of Nanaimo

Request to change the zoning bylaws of the Regional District of Nanaimo to prohibit the bottling of groundwater for commercial sale or bulk export

My name is Bruce Gibbons, and I live in Merville. I am here to address the Board about the issue of protecting groundwater on Vancouver Island and all over British Columbia. In November of 2017, the Government approved a groundwater extraction licence for a resident of Merville to bottle and sell water from the Comox Valley aquifer. We successfully campaigned for the CVRD to deny the rezoning necessary to bottle the water on site. Therefore, the current licence does not allow the applicant to utilize his licence and bottle water on his property. However, his water extraction licence is still valid, so I have been campaigning to prevent him from trucking the water to a site that allows bottling of groundwater. I have approached all AVICC communities asking them to revise their bylaws to prevent bottling of groundwater by any water licence holder.

I filed an appeal against the water licence last March, but after a lengthy battle with the FLNRO Ministry, the Environmental Appeal Board dismissed the appeal, stating that I did not have standing to appeal. That exposed a serious flaw in the Water Sustainability Act that denies appeal of a water licence unless the licence physically detrimentally affects your land, not your water, or your access to water. The Water Sustainability Act does not protect my water or my access to water. I find that appalling. We have approximately 1,200 signatures to date on a petition that will be presented to the government in the BC Legislature on Mar 27<sup>th</sup> by our MLA, asking them to stop approving licences to bottle and sell groundwater. We also have an online petition with 1,340 signatures to date.

If BC's aquifers are depleted then the thousands of residents and farmers who rely on them will not be able to look after their personal needs for drinking water, sanitation, growing their backyard gardens or growing their crops and raising their livestock. That would put our food security at risk. Without water, farmers cannot produce our food, and as we have seen with the severe drought in California, we will not be able to continue to rely on importing our food from that source. Without water, there is no life. We are facing population growth that will put more demand on the aquifers and we are already seeing the negative effects of climate change impact the quality and quantity of water in the summer drought period. We experienced level 4 drought all over Vancouver Island this past summer. Residents and farmers were told to conserve water, yet corporations with provincial water licences are allowed to continue pumping and generating huge profits from the aquifers we all rely on despite the level 4 drought. There is not enough information known about our aquifers to risk bottling and selling any of the water. Climate change is causing extended periods of serious drought, putting rivers, streams, fish habitat and fish stocks at risk. And it is causing sources of recharge for the aquifers to disappear evidenced by receding glaciers and diminishing snowpacks.

There is an existing, real threat to the groundwater of Vancouver Island. We asked the CVRD to amend their bylaws to prohibit the bottling of water. That bylaw revision is in process. I asked the Village of Cumberland to prohibit water bottling, and the Village has since changed their zoning bylaws to prohibit bottling of groundwater. I asked the City of Courtenay to prohibit bottling of groundwater in their zoning bylaws. Courtenay Council passed a motion to prohibit the bottling of

groundwater. And I just recently asked the Town of Comox to revise their bylaws to prohibit water bottling. In September I contacted the Strathcona Regional District (SRD), since the Merville water licence holder had stated that he may approach them in an attempt to bottle his water in their region. The SRD took immediate steps to prevent the water bottling and on Jan 24<sup>th</sup> the SRD also passed a resolution to be presented to the AVICC and the UBCM asking the provincial government to cease approval of licences for bottling of groundwater for commercial sale or bulk export. As I mentioned earlier, I have contacted all AVICC member communities asking them to revise their bylaws to prohibit bottling of groundwater, and to support the SRD Resolution. There are 12 communities to date that do not permit the bottling of groundwater, I have presented to Comox and Esquimalt recently, and I am scheduled to present to 3 other communities. I have submitted written requests to several other communities in an attempt to get as many communities as possible to prohibit the bottling of groundwater for commercial sale or bulk export. I have included an excerpt from the Sunshine Coast Regional District Policy Manual, which illustrates their commitment to the protection of groundwater, and is a policy to ascribe to and emulate. I am pleased to note that Area F expressly prohibits water bottling, and I am also very impressed and pleased with the steps taken to protect drinking water with the Drinking Water Watershed Protection Program.

I have 2 requests for the Regional District of Nanaimo.

- 1) that you consider taking the necessary steps to implement a bylaw that prohibits bottling of groundwater in any of your zoning in all Electoral areas, to help protect our groundwater today and for our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren in the future.
- 2) I also ask that the Regional District of Nanaimo support the Strathcona Regional District resolution at the April AVICC convention, to ask the Provincial Government to cease the approval of licences for commercial extraction of groundwater resources for bottling or bulk water sales.

We cannot allow water bottling from our aquifers based on theory and calculations. The consequences of being wrong could be catastrophic. I would sincerely appreciate the support of the Regional District of Nanaimo in protecting the above ground uses of our groundwater by preventing anyone from bottling and selling water from any aquifer in BC. Water is our most precious resource. Water is life. We must do everything we can to protect and conserve it. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Bruce Gibbons

Merville Water Guardians

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