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Jean Crowder,
Member Parliament for Nanaimo-Cowichan
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Wednesday August 6th 2008

Minister Crowder,

Your letter dated June 3rd to Minister Chuck Strahl was most welcome, few MPs take the time to try and understand the issues and instead appear to be happy to let the problems continue to fester. We sincerely thank you for sharing our concerns and suggestions for solutions.

We recently had a four month position funded for a Policy Intern and one of the results of this has been to post on our website all federal reports pertaining to the upcoming Action Plan for First Nations Drinking Water (Auditor General, Expert Panel etc. etc.). Repeatedly, recommendations have already been made for national water quality regulations, enforceable by law, and for an independent regulatory body. Despite this overwhelming directive Minister Strahl is stalling again asking for more provincial consultations, this means more delays, and more money into the “old boys’ network”.

During 2007 Minister Strahl and/or Minister Prentice (then Minister for INAC) directed all Contribution Agreements with First Nations to be changed to download total responsibility to First Nation Chiefs and Councilors for drinking water quality. SDWF estimates that most First Nation Leaders didn’t notice the change in small print. Still today no official notification or explanation has been given to them, either individually or via their national Association First Nations (AFN). Of those who noticed the change most did not believe the implications, while some initially refused to sign such agreements they soon changed their minds as they could not survive the federal government with-holding payments for all of their community services. **This amounted to nothing less than blackmail or extortion!**

Canada already has 56 guidelines for drinking water quality. IF these guidelines were followed we would be well on the way to comparing the quality of Canadians’ drinking water with that of Europeans and Americans, and we wouldn’t need SDWF! Instead Health Canada routinely only test five of the 56 parameters. INAC are supposed to monitor source waters (although they rarely do), Health Canada are supposed to monitor treated waters – neither of them share their data with each other, and neither of them can determine if any water treatment process (or plant) is

actually effective! Both INAC and Health Canada are supposed to regulate themselves – which is like asking them to shoot themselves in the foot! Repeatedly INAC direct funds to Engineers to build, or add on to existing infrastructure, with systems that have been implemented time and time again and have never produced safe drinking water – and never will! Are these dollars really helping First Nations or the non aboriginal corporations who make an easy and healthy profit from the contracts? Meanwhile Minister Strahl repeatedly makes media announcement that millions more of tax payers money are being spent on First Nations water crisis. He may as well drop \$1 bills from an aircraft, it would be equally effective.

Similarly, regarding the point you make in your letter about increased Boil Water Advisories, each time a community is on a BWA it results in truck loads of bottled water being sent to the community and more media releases as to the huge amount of tax payers money being spent on “First Nations”. The reality is that this amounts to huge contracts again to non-aboriginal corporations, to make easy and significant profits off the backs of our First Nation people. When SDWF first came to the rescue of Yellow Quill First Nations, the first step we took was to establish a bottled water facility, at a cost of approx \$20,000 it produced sufficient bottled water for the community, with 1.5 full time employment positions also created, it required no trucking, thereby minimizing the environmental footprint – there is no reason why this template cannot be adopted for all First Nation and Rural communities faced with BWA’s! The monthly cost to operate was around \$3,000 per month for the production and distribution of the bottled water. Compare that to \$14,000 per month when a non aboriginal outside company was hired to truck in drinking water. The payback time was just a matter of months!

SDWF has proved repeatedly that the most challenging ground water can produce truly safe drinking water, not just by meeting Canadian guidelines but by meeting or exceeding far more stringent international standards. This has also been achieved leaving the smallest possible environmental footprint, because little or no chemicals are used in the process. We know what needs to be done, we know how it can be done, we have solutions - there is no reason at all why ALL Canadians cannot have truly safe drinking water. The biological system developed on ground water at Yellow Quill First Nation in SK in 2004 has now been implemented at George Gordon and Pasqua First Nations. Pilot testing on surface water is in final stages at Saddle Lake Cree Nation in AB and all indications are it will be equally effective. As these communities become pioneers of these new processes so the operators are fast becoming knowledgeable and keen to complete training as members of SDWF Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team (AAWTT). While we have developed solutions, SDWF would be happy to endorse any system which proves equally effective.

Mr. Nathan Cullen, MP for Skeena – Bulkley Valley also in BC. replied to us around the same time as yourself. He indicated an interest in perhaps organizing a Forum or Meeting to move this issue forward. We would be very happy to help with such an initiative. The last federal “Forum,” SDWF participated in was organised by Dennis Mills in 2002 in Wahta ON. Mr. Mills chose not to reimburse many of the First Nation people he had pleaded with to attend (and promised to cover their expenses). Indeed SDWF was not reimbursed as promised either.

I would like to close this letter with a quote by Paul Farmer, author of “Mountains beyond Mountains” and more recently “Pathologies of Power”, he stated: **“Human rights violations are not accidents; they are not random in distribution or effect. Rights violations are, rather, symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are linked intimately to the social conditions that so often determine who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm”.**

What you do now with this information reflects far more on you than it does on the issues we are striving to improve. Politics may be the root cause of these problems, but I hope they won't be the basis of your decisions. SDWF has the scientific knowledge, the strong partnerships and working relationships with many First Nation people (based on hard earned trust), together with the ethical and moral values required to make safe drinking water accessible for ALL Canadians. We are eager to work with you toward this goal and look forward to hearing from you soon. I am available almost 24/7 at 306-867-8067.

For the latest information please visit www.safewater.org, go to Policy to review all federal “inaction”, especially scroll down to the Report Library and read the last article, the Polaris Report; and please go to “Water News – Publications” – and read our Canadian Medical Journal and Canadian Water Treatment articles.

Sincerely,



Sue Peterson
Volunteer Administrator

cc. Nathan Cullen