

CEWF Applauds Signing of Memorandum of Understanding between the Federal and Ontario governments respecting “Enhanced Cooperation and Collaboration in the Future Management of the Trent-Severn Waterway and its Watersheds”

On July 14, 2011 the federal and provincial governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) respecting “*Enhanced Cooperation and Collaboration in the Future Management of the Trent-Severn Waterway and its Watersheds*”.

The text of the MOU is to be made available on the Parks Canada website and a copy is also posted on the CEWF website in conjunction with this article.

The MOU is a high level document that establishes a framework, principles and priorities for the proposed cooperation and collaboration.

CEWF is particularly interested in what the MOU has to say regarding water management in the Trent watershed. In that regard we note that:

The ‘principles’ include:

- Conservation and Management of natural and cultural resources through **a precautionary, integrated, and adaptive approach**; and
- Respect for public safety, economic sustainability, environmental health, ecological sustainability and conservation of biodiversity in the management of the waterway and its watersheds. *[emphasis added]*.

In terms of ‘priorities’, two of the eight priorities identified touch upon water management as follows:

- Canada will establish and fund a Water Management Advisory Council to provide advice on water allocation and related matters. Ontario will participate as a member of the Council.
- Canada will sponsor a Leadership Forum as a strategic venue for leaders in the TSW and its watersheds to develop an overall shared vision of water management on a watershed basis, to consult on priorities and confirm commitment to collective action.

CEWF notes that the Water Management Advisory Council was announced on March 9, 2010 and has already met several times. Similarly a Leadership Forum was held on January 20, 2011.

There is therefore little that is new in terms of the planned approach to implementation of the MOU’s principles or priorities as they relate to water management.

Context of the MOU and CEWF Analysis of Progress Represented by the MOU

To put the MOU in context it is necessary to understand the process that led to this document.

In March 2008 the federally appointed Panel on the Future of the TSW released its report, including 26 recommendations.

In September 2009, the federal government responded to the Report with an Action Plan that proposed, in part, the development of an MOU with Ontario within six months to detail areas of collaboration and coordination.

With regard to water management, the 2008 Panel Report contained three key recommendations *[emphasis added]*:

- Work towards the goal of **integrated water management** by asserting Federal Government rights and responsibilities to control storage, flows, and allocation of water from the two watersheds (Recommendation #4);
- Improve management of water by creating and appropriately funding **an independent water management agency, reporting to the federal Minister of Natural Resources**, to assume responsibility for managing water storage, flows, allocation and use in the Trent and Severn watersheds (Recommendation #11); and
- Better assure adequate water supplies throughout the Trent-Severn Heritage Region in the future by:
 - Promoting an **integrated approach to water management**
 - Fostering a strong **water conservation** ethic as part of the formal mandate of the water management authority; and
 - Implementing a Canada/Ontario harmonized water-pricing regime that helps to offset water management costs and encourages water conservation.

The federal government's 2009 Action Plan, which proposed development of an MOU with Ontario, indicated that the content would include water management and that under the MOU protocols could be established regarding (the federal and provincial governments) working together and with the Water Management Advisory Council regarding **better management of:**

- **water storage**
- **water flows**
- **water allocation & use in the two watersheds**

The government rejected the creation of an 'independent' water management agency, but spoke of the need for a 'balanced approach' for water management in the two watersheds; presumably the equivalent of the more standard term 'integrated water management at the watershed level'.

The MOU appears to equate federal-provincial collaboration on water management with the participation by Ontario on the Water Management Advisory Council. No

mention is made of better management of “water storage, flows and use” as a priority or of “conservation measures”.

Conclusion

While CEWF applauds the signing of the MOU, there remains concern that water management issues are not identified as priorities, at least in a manner that reflects the principles espoused in the MOU as well as in the Panel Report and the government’s own Action Plan.

It is recognized that , in times of fiscal constraint, it has been difficult for the government to find public infrastructure funding to support maintenance of the TSW’s dams and locks. However, it is disappointing that important policy work with regard to integrated watershed management and the resolution of jurisdictional issues appears not to have been adequately addressed.

CEWF is forced to conclude that neither level of government wishes to engage with the other in a meaningful way, leaving the TSW to survive with insufficient funding and an expanded mandate that embraces integrated water management for two watersheds as well as operation of the canal.