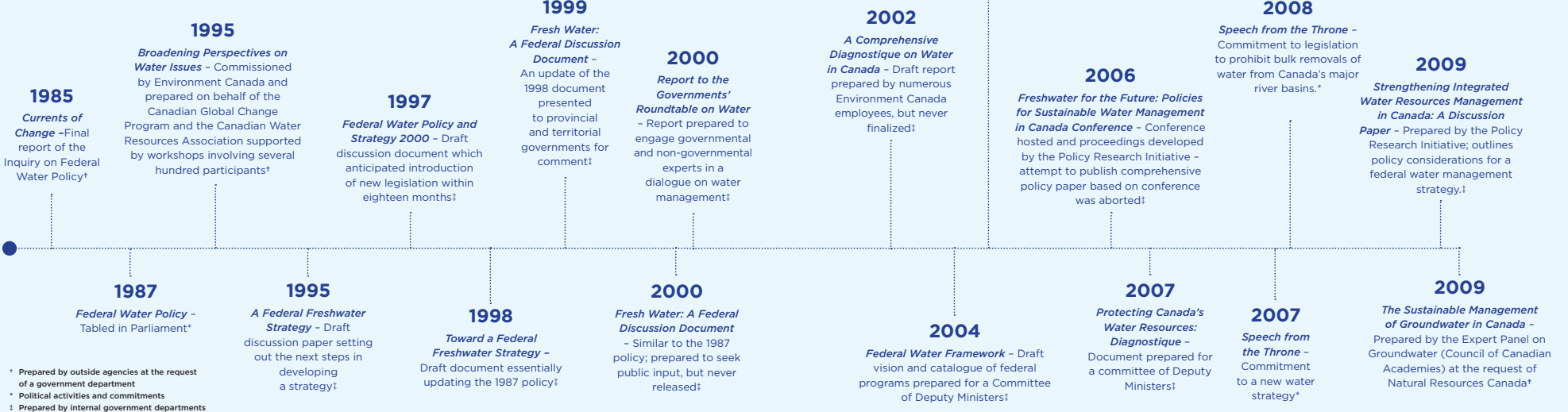


## OPINION



**2006**  
Federal Interests in Water: Setting EC's Priorities - Draft report likely prepared in response to criticism from the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development†

## CHRONOLOGY - ATTEMPTS AT A FEDERAL WATER STRATEGY



Source: Forum for Leadership on Water

# Feds fail to implement strategy to protect our water

Canadians regard fresh water as the country's most important natural resource—even over oil and gas and forestry, according to a recent Nanos-Policy Options public survey.

By NANCY GOUCHER

TORONTO—I am talking about an issue that is at the very heart of the Canadian economy and culture. Practically every

industry—agriculture, electric power, industrial manufacturing, tourism—relies on it to sustain their business. It's integral to spirituality, recreational activities and healthy communities. It's at risk of over-use and deteriorating quality. The federal government has spent over 20 years trying to articulate a plan to protect this important resource but has had no success.

Water.

Canadians regard fresh water as the country's most important natural resource—even over oil and gas and forestry, according to a recent Nanos-Policy Options public survey.

Yet, our federal government has failed to implement a strategy to protect our water—despite numerous current and emerging challenges threatening both the supply and quality of this resource.

The last federal water policy was tabled in Parliament two decades ago. It was never fully implemented and was essentially shelved in the mid-1990s. Since then, there have been well over a dozen attempts to articulate a new water strategy. The federal government has failed every time—revealing a troubling pattern of failure to protect Canada's most important resource.

Most recently, the current government made a commitment to develop a “new water strategy” in the Speech from the Throne two years ago. Earlier this year, the Auditor General's Office noted that negligible progress has been made on implementing this strategy.

While the numerous attempts to develop a water strategy indicate that the federal government has acknowledged the importance of water, it is unclear why none of these efforts have ever been converted into an actual strategy. Perhaps it is lack of political will, or the difficulty of building consensus between federal departments, or the fear of stepping into provincial jurisdiction. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Canadians are unwilling to wait another 20 years for comprehensive action at the national level.

The need for a federal water strategy is urgent. We must act now to safeguard our water against climate change, increasing water demands and the pollution of rivers and lakes. We need to start by making headway on critical problems such as the unacceptable number of communities that lack access to safe drinking water.

A federal strategy would signal that governments consider water protection to be a national priority and would help ensure we have enough clean water to keep Canadians healthy, to grow food, to support economic prosperity and keep our rivers flowing.

Recent polls suggest that Canadians consider the adoption of a federal water strategy to be the top priority for addressing Canada's fresh water challenges. With overwhelming public support, it is surely time for the federal government to make a clear commitment and start delivering. Our nation's most important natural resource depends on it.

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