

Press Release
For Immediate Release
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Water Experts Call for Federal Support for Canada's Most Important Water Body

The week of June 5-14 has been designated Boundary Waters Week to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Boundary Waters Treaty. On this occasion, the Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW) is calling for the federal government to invest in Canadian water security by providing greater support to the International Joint Commission.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) is the binational body created by the Treaty to resolve disputes between Canada and the U.S. over shared boundary waters. While celebrating its successes over the last century, this group of respected experts is concerned that the relevance of the Commission has been called into question in recent years due to inadequate resources and insufficient support.

“The Treaty was way ahead of its time, and the IJC should be congratulated for a century of unprecedented success in proactively addressing issues of concern in waters shared by Canada and the United States,” remarked Jim Bruce, FLOW Co-chair and former Canadian co-chair of the IJC Great Lakes Water Quality Board. “The Treaty is a truly remarkable document; its principles are just as relevant today as they were in 1909.”

“The IJC exemplifies for the rest of the world how successfully transboundary water relations can be conducted between riparian neighbors” said Bob Sandford, Chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the United Nations ‘Water for Life’ Decade.

The Commission has received close to 100 references in 100 years of existence, and has only failed to reach a full consensus on two occasions. Governments have acted on their recommendations in the vast majority of cases. However, there are both new opportunities and worrying trends as the Commission enters its second century.

“The IJC should be congratulated for its International Watersheds Initiative, which recognizes the complex interplay between socio-economic and environmental factors, and between water quality and quantity issues,” stated Ralph Pentland, who has Co-chaired five different IJC Boards and Committees. “But much greater government support is needed to extend the concept to many more basins over the coming decade in light of increasing competition for scarce resources, and newer challenges like climate change.”

“In recent years, there has been a disturbing trend towards substituting expedient political processes for the sound technical ones offered by the IJC. The Devils Lake outlet and Red River Valley Water Supply projects are recent examples of this approach,” noted Norm Brandson, former Deputy Minister of the Manitoba Department of Water Stewardship. “Unless we

strategically rebuild the credibility of the Boundary Waters Treaty and the IJC to resolve trans-boundary water disputes, we seriously compromise the integrity of shared ecosystems to the detriment of both countries.”

“A key opportunity for the governments is to build on prior successes of the IJC in the Great Lakes by renegotiating the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*, and in the process find ways to better coordinate water quality programs in the upstream Great Lakes and downstream St. Lawrence basins,” stated Marc Hudon, Director of Nature Quebec’s St. Lawrence River/Great Lakes Program. And in terms of aboriginal water issues, Merrell-Ann Phare, Executive Director of the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, commented that “the IJC is perfectly poised to consider increasingly intractable issues such as reconciliation of the interests, rights and ambitions of First Nations, Metis and Native American peoples who are impacted by transboundary water disputes.”

An earlier report by several FLOW members entitled *Changing the Flow: A Blueprint for Federal Action on Freshwater* called on the federal government to “work with U.S. counterparts to inject the IJC with the capacity it needs—financial, technical and staffing—to evolve to meet new challenges.” That same report described a troubling loss of national water science capacity in recent years, which has compromised the ability to adequately support the IJC’s activities and to protect national water security more generally.

FLOW calls upon the government to expeditiously meet its commitment to develop a new water strategy, and in so doing to ensure that the important work of the International Joint Commission is appropriately recognized.

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