

Troubled Waters

Ever since the Walkerton tragedy almost a decade ago, when seven people died and more than 2,000 others became ill as a result of contaminated drinking water, water management has risen to the forefront of the Canadian political agenda. Since then, most provinces have adopted legislation to ensure water safety and quality, and several research reports have improved our knowledge of the complex issues around this question. But recent events like the blue-green algae contamination of numerous lakes in Quebec last summer and the Red River floods in Manitoba this past spring, or the harnessing of rivers for hydroelectric generation in northern Quebec and the use of large quantities of water in oil-sands projects in Alberta, have shown yet again how fragile this natural resource is and how paramount it is for people, the environment and the economy.

This double issue of *Policy Options* brings together a wide range of experts to take stock of the water question in Canada. Despite the diversity of the topics covered, a few broad conclusions emerge which are useful to keep in mind from the outset. First, two widespread myths are debunked: one, Canada does not enjoy an overabundance of freshwater; two, bulk water exports to the United States remain highly hypothetical projects and should not draw our attention away from the real issues. Four such issues surfaced throughout the contributions included here: water management should aim for conservation and managing demand; the cost of water needs to be better estimated and pricing policy developed accordingly; coordination among levels of government needs to be improved and mechanisms of cooperation created, both nationally and internationally; and our scientific knowledge of water must be improved.

The thematic opens with two exclusives: an interview by L. Ian MacDonald with Jim Prentice, the federal Environment Minister, and an opinion poll by Nanos Research, sponsored by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. Our poll confirms that a large majority of Canadians regard water as the most important natural resource for the future of Canada and suggests that they are prepared to pay more for it.

Eleven authors — among the foremost water experts in the country — then examine various aspects of our

Eaux troubles

Depuis la tragédie de Walkerton il y a presque 10 ans, alors que sept personnes sont décédées et plus de 2 000 autres sont tombées malades à la suite de la contamination de l'eau potable, la gestion de notre eau a pris une place grandissante à l'ordre du jour politique. Depuis, la plupart des provinces ont adopté des lois visant à assurer sa sécurité et sa qualité, et plusieurs rapports sont venus alimenter notre connaissance des enjeux multiples et complexes que soulève cette question. Entretemps, de nombreux événements ont confirmé à la fois la fragilité de cette ressource naturelle tout comme son incroyable importance pour les personnes, l'environnement et l'économie, que ce soit la contamination aux algues bleues de nombreux lacs québécois l'été dernier ou les inondations de la rivière Rouge au Manitoba ce printemps, l'harnachement de rivières dans le Grand Nord québécois pour la production hydroélectrique ou encore l'utilisation de grandes quantités d'eau pour l'exploitation des sables bitumineux de l'Alberta.

Dans ce numéro double d'*Options politiques*, nous avons réuni plusieurs experts pour faire le point sur la situation de l'eau au Canada. Malgré la diversité des sujets abordés, il ressort de cet exercice quelques conclusions importantes qu'il est utile de résumer d'entrée de jeu.

Deux grands mythes sont d'abord déboulonnés : un, le Canada ne jouit pas d'une surabondance d'eau douce ; deux, l'exportation d'eau en grande quantité vers les États-Unis demeure un projet des plus hypothétiques, qui ne devrait pas détourner notre attention des vrais défis. À ce sujet, quatre enjeux se dégagent : adopter un mode de gestion de l'eau axé sur la conservation et le contrôle de la demande ; mieux estimer le coût réel de l'eau et développer une politique de prix conséquente ; améliorer la coordination entre les divers paliers de gouvernement et mettre en place des mécanismes de coopération, tant à l'échelle nationale qu'internationale ; renforcer nos connaissances sur l'eau.

Notre thème s'ouvre par une entrevue exclusive avec le ministre fédéral de l'Environnement, Jim Prentice, et un sondage de Nanos Research, commandité par la Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. Notre sondage confirme que l'eau est la ressource naturelle la plus importante aux yeux des Canadiens et que ceux-ci seraient disposés à payer davantage pour en assurer la qualité d'approvisionnement.

water challenge. Karen Bakker sets the context by explaining why and how we must care about this natural resource, while Rob de Loë draws the broad outlines of a Canadian water policy. Harry Swain describes some of the basic rules governing the proper treatment of wastewater and suggests measures likely to improve our record in this regard. Steven Renzetti and Colin Busby address the controversial issue of water pricing and argue that the very low prices charged in Canada are the reason why Canadians, along with their American neighbours, are the world's biggest water users.

To illustrate the progress that has been achieved in recent years and assess what still remains to be done, three contributors each examine a different province: Alexandre Brun looks at Quebec, Hans Schreier deals with British Columbia and Lorne Taylor discusses developments in Alberta. But if there is one thing that water does not follow, it is boundaries: Ralph Pentland analyses Canada-US water relations, particularly in the context of the management of the Great Lakes, while Frédéric Lasserre looks at massive water transfers and Margaret Catley-Carlson writes about international institutions and the need to adopt adequate dispute-management mechanisms.

Finally, David McLaughlin, President and CEO of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, shows us how essential water is — not only for our health and the environment but also for our prosperity.

Our summer issue also contains a fascinating dossier on Nunavut. Established in 1999, the youngest Canadian territory celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The new territory has faced enormous challenges in its first decade, and much work remains to be done in order to achieve the goals its creation intended. To mark this anniversary *Policy Options* proposes four retrospectives, all very instructive: the first by Barry Dewar, who represented the federal side in the negotiations that led to the signing of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement; the second by Terry Fenge and Paul Quassa, who were closely involved in the negotiations on behalf of the Inuit; the third by Thierry Rodon of Laval University; and the last by Michael Mifflin.

In addition, our *Plus* section includes two contributions on current events: Jack Stilborn addresses the role of the governor general when the government loses the confidence of the House, and Kumanan Wilson discusses Canada's role in the management of global health crises.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not thank my colleague David Boisclair, for his assistance in preparing the thematic, and L. Ian MacDonald for his support and encouragement. The entire *Policy Options/IRPP* team wishes to congratulate Ian on the birth of his daughter, Zara Kheiriddin-MacDonald. He will be back in the fall. In the meantime, enjoy a happy and safe summer!

Le cœur de notre numéro est composé de 11 articles écrits par certains des meilleurs experts de l'eau au pays. Karen Bakker met la table et nous explique pourquoi et comment nous devons nous occuper de notre eau, tandis que Rob de Loë présente les grandes lignes d'une politique pancanadienne de l'eau. Harry Swain décrit les rudiments d'un traitement efficace des eaux usées et propose des mesures susceptibles d'améliorer notre bilan. Steven Renzetti et Colin Busby abordent la question controversée du prix de l'eau et soutiennent que ce sont les très bas prix pratiqués au Canada qui expliquent pourquoi les Canadiens, avec les Américains, comptent parmi les plus grands consommateurs d'eau au monde.

Pour mieux illustrer les avancées réalisées ces dernières années — et le chemin qui demeure encore à parcourir —, trois articles examinent la situation dans trois provinces : Alexandre Brun, au Québec ; Hans Schreier, en Colombie-Britannique ; et Lorne Taylor, en Alberta. Mais s'il est une chose que l'eau ne respecte pas, ce sont bien les frontières. Ralph Pentland s'intéresse donc aux relations canado-américaines, à propos de la gestion de l'eau des Grands Lacs notamment, et Frédéric Lasserre aborde la question des transferts massifs d'eau, tandis que Margaret Catley-Carlson fait le point sur les institutions internationales et la nécessité d'adopter des mécanismes adéquats de gestion des conflits.

Enfin, le président de la Table ronde nationale sur l'environnement et l'économie, David McLaughlin, explique que l'eau n'est pas seulement fondamentale pour notre santé et celle de l'environnement, mais également pour notre prospérité.

On trouvera également, pour compléter ce numéro estival, un fascinant dossier sur le Nunavut. Créé en 1999, le dernier né des territoires canadiens célèbre cette année son dixième anniversaire. Le Nunavut a dû faire face à d'immenses défis au cours de cette première décennie, et beaucoup de travail reste à faire pour réaliser les objectifs qu'on s'était donnés lors de la création de ce territoire. Barry Dewar, qui a été le négociateur fédéral lors des négociations qui ont mené à l'Accord du Nunavut, Terry Fenge et Paul Quassa, qui ont été intimement liés aux négociations pour le compte des Inuits, Thierry Rodon de l'Université Laval, et Michael Mifflin nous proposent quatre rétrospectives, toutes critiques et toutes fort instructives.

Finalement, deux contributions libres sur des sujets d'actualité : Jack Stilborn sur le rôle du gouverneur général quand le gouvernement perd la confiance de la Chambre et Kumanan Wilson sur le rôle du Canada dans la gestion des urgences sanitaires de portée mondiale.

Je m'en voudrais en terminant de ne pas remercier mon collègue David Boisclair pour son assistance dans la préparation de la thématique et L. Ian MacDonald pour sa confiance et son appui. Toute l'équipe d'*Options politiques* et de l'IRPP désire également féliciter Ian pour la naissance de sa petite fille, Zara Kheiriddin-MacDonald. Il sera de retour à l'automne. D'ici là, passez un bel été !

possibilities

Q&A: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO INTEROPERABILITY

The complex task of getting people, systems and IT to work together seamlessly in mixed IT environments is an important priority, and challenge, for Canadian governments and for governments around the world.

Possibilities, a Microsoft Canada publication dedicated to celebrating innovative achievements and fostering thought-leading discussions with the public sector, sat down with Theresa Pardo and Brian Burke from the Center for Technology in Government at the University at Albany, SUNY, to discuss their most recent research on interoperability in government.

Q: What is interoperability?

Theresa Pardo: Interoperability is often associated with technology, but it's also about management and public policy. We know, for example, that the technology that enables the sharing of individual health records already exists. But from a regulatory or legislative perspective, the freedom to actually share that data is still limited. So if a government wants to pursue electronic health records or any other initiative that requires interoperability, it must first have the appropriate policies in place.

Q: In your most recent research, you refer to interoperability as an "intense struggle." Why is it so difficult for governments to achieve?

TP: There are several reasons. The first is resource allocation. Agencies or systems can't connect to each other if there is no money in their budgets to support a broader interoperability agenda, and government budgets don't necessarily account for the co-mingling of spending and priorities. Generally speaking, there are no resource allocation models in place that actually support the kind of tasks that have to be carried out to create truly interoperable policies, practices and technologies.

Brian Burke: Another hurdle is getting leaders, whether in government or the private sector, to understand that the work that they do plays a critical role in making interoperability possible. Too often they'll say "the IT shop can't seem to get this major business process implemented across six agencies" when it's not an IT problem to begin with. It comes down to the people: the front-line managers, policy makers or agency executives. Finally, interoperability can be difficult to measure in traditional terms. Interoperability "wins" are not the kind of initiatives that traditionally get talked about in a press release. I think this is another challenge.

Q: What's at stake? Why is it important to get interoperability right?

TP: Interoperability leads to a government worth having, a government that operates at a new level and demonstrates very visible benefits to its citizens. This is an important factor, as people increasingly expect the government to offer immediate and seamless services, similar to Amazon.com or eBay. We're already seeing results: look at New York, for example, where a business can apply in one place for all the permits they require from various labour and liquor boards. That's an example of something that has a tangible benefit for citizens.



Interoperability also touches things the citizen doesn't see directly, such as improving emergency response or public safety capabilities, or giving governments the ability to track vendors in a more informed way and ensure that the contracting practice is transparent. These are the kinds of initiatives that increase the value of government in the lives of citizens.

Q: Can you point to some success stories?

TP: The criminal justice system is a great example, where the ability to share information across multiple criminal justice organizations and, therefore, improve public safety is quite evident. You see it as well in public health, in responding to disease outbreaks like the West Nile virus.

Q: Are there any in Canada?

BB: Service New Brunswick, a one-stop portal for citizens who need information or a service from the provincial government, is a successful example of providing citizens with services they need, and it has everything to do with interoperability. New Brunswick has done customer satisfaction surveys and found that citizens are very satisfied with their government. That is a direct result of interoperability.

Q: How do government executives go about solving the interoperability challenge to create more of these successes?

BB: As we said earlier, you can get there when an executive recognizes the need to create a truly interoperable government. During the initiative to combat the West Nile virus, for example, the commissioner of Public Health who led the project basically said to all of the state agencies, "You will work together to make this happen." It was amazing what happened as a consequence of that statement, and it's a great example of the kind of executive leadership that made it possible for agencies and local governments to come together in a new way and create a capability that didn't exist before.

For additional information about interoperability, visit www.microsoft.ca/interop

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