

## Presentation to City of Nanaimo

March 25, 2019

Mr. Mayor, Councillors and staff of the City of Nanaimo

Request to change the zoning bylaws of the City of Nanaimo to prohibit the bottling of groundwater for commercial sale or bulk export

My name is Bruce Gibbons, and I live in Merville, in the Comox Valley. I am here to address council about the issue of protecting groundwater on Vancouver Island and all over British Columbia. My campaign started with a water licence approved just over a year ago, for a resident of Merville to bottle and sell water from the Comox Valley aquifer. We successfully campaigned for the CVRD to deny the rezoning necessary to bottle the water on site, stopping the operation temporarily. However, his water extraction licence is still valid, so I have been campaigning to prevent him from trucking the water to a site that permits bottling of groundwater. I have approached all AVICC communities asking them to revise their bylaws to prevent bottling of groundwater by any water licence holder, in order to avoid this type of issue in future.

I filed an appeal against the water licence, but the Environmental Appeal Board dismissed my appeal, stating that I did not prove that the licence would detrimentally affect my land. Not my water or my access to water. The Water Sustainability Act does not protect my water or my access to water. I find that appalling. We have approximately 1,200 signatures to date on a petition to the Government asking them to stop approving licences to bottle and sell groundwater. That petition will be presented on March 27<sup>th</sup> by our MLA. We also have an online petition with 1,340 signatures to date.

If BC's aquifers are depleted, then the thousands of residents and farmers who rely on them will not be able to look after their personal needs for drinking water, sanitation, growing their backyard gardens or growing their crops and raising their livestock. That would put our food security at risk. Without water, farmers cannot produce our food, and as we have seen with the severe drought in California, we will not be able to continue to rely on importing our food from that source. Without water, there is no life. Population growth will put more demand on the aquifers and we are already seeing the negative effects of climate change impact the quality and quantity of water evidenced by the level 4 drought all over Vancouver Island this past summer. There is not enough information known about our aquifers to risk bottling and selling any of the water, let alone the millions of liters of water being bottled and sold by corporations for huge profits. Climate change is causing extended periods of drought, putting rivers, streams, fish habitat and fish stocks at risk. We are seeing receding glaciers and diminishing snowpacks. Many water systems on the Island are currently reporting extreme low water levels for this time of year, and warning that there may be serious repercussions in the summer. We are currently in a winter drought.

There is an existing, real threat to the groundwater of Vancouver Island. I approached the CVRD, the Village of Cumberland and the City of Courtenay. They have all changed or are in the process of changing their bylaws to prohibit the bottling of groundwater. I just recently asked the Town of Comox to revise their bylaws to prohibit water bottling and that request is still under consideration. In September I contacted the Strathcona Regional District (SRD), since the Merville water licence holder had stated that he may approach them in an attempt to bottle his water in their region. The SRD took immediate steps to prevent the water bottling and on Jan 24<sup>th</sup> the SRD also passed a resolution to be

presented to the AVICC and the UBCM asking the provincial government to cease approval of licences for bottling of groundwater for commercial sale or bulk export. I have contacted all AVICC member communities asking them to revise their bylaws to prohibit bottling of groundwater, and to support the SRD Resolution. There are 15 communities to date that do not permit the bottling of groundwater, I have presented to Comox, Esquimalt, Colwood and Qualicum Beach recently, and I am scheduled to present to 3 other communities. I have submitted written requests to all other communities in an attempt to get as many as possible to prohibit the bottling of groundwater. Many communities are actively including water as a natural asset in their planning. I have distributed a handout which is an excerpt from the Sunshine Coast Regional District Policy Manual, which illustrates their commitment to the protection of groundwater, and is a policy I believe all communities should aspire to and emulate. Local governments cannot control the licencing of water for extraction, but they can control the businesses that they permit to operate in their zoning bylaws.

I have 2 requests for the City of Nanaimo.

- 1) that you consider taking the necessary steps to implement a bylaw that prohibits bottling of groundwater in any of your zoning, to help protect our groundwater today and for our children and grandchildren in the future.
- 2) I also ask that the City of Nanaimo support the Strathcona Regional District resolution at the April AVICC convention, to ask the Provincial Government to cease the approval of licences for commercial extraction of groundwater resources for bottling or bulk water sales.

We cannot allow water bottling from our aquifers based on theory and calculations. The consequences of being wrong could be catastrophic. I would sincerely appreciate the support of the City of Nanaimo in protecting the above ground uses of our groundwater by preventing anyone from bottling and selling water from any aquifer in BC. Water is our most precious resource. Water is life. We must do everything we can to protect and conserve it. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Bruce Gibbons

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