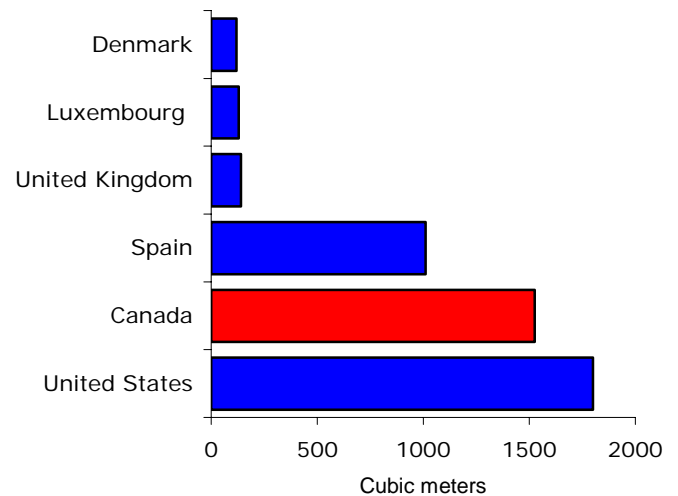


## What will it take to control water withdrawals in the Great Lakes Basin?

Fact sheet

June 2004

Today governments in the Great Lakes basin still manage water use on a crisis-by-crisis basis. One such crisis arose in 1998 when the government of Ontario granted a permit to Nova Group to pump Lake Superior water onto a tanker for shipment to Asia. After a Great Lakes-wide furor erupted, the permit was withdrawn. This was the first time global water needs came knocking at the doors of the Great Lakes for a remedy, but it likely will not be the last. In reaction to broad public attention to the Nova incident, governments in both Canada and the U.S. took action. The Canadian and U.S. governments asked the International Joint Commission (IJC) to assess the state of water protection in the Great Lakes.



Canada ranks 29th among the 30 nations of the OECD in terms of water resources used per capita.  
*OECD Key Environmental Indicators 2004*

The IJC identified the following main problems as needing basin-wide attention:

- bulk water withdrawals,
- increased consumptive use of water,
- cumulative impacts of smaller withdrawals and diversions out of the basin,
- increased demands for water by communities just outside the Great Lakes basin,
- climate change.

The main point made by the IJC is that, despite the common perception, the waters of the Great Lakes are not limitless. Rainfall and snowmelt replenish only about one percent of the waters of the Great Lakes basin each year. The other 99% of the water is finite and nonrenewable; we mine it at our own peril.

The other central understanding that we have come to is that exports and diversions out of the Great Lakes basin are secondary as a threat to the Great Lakes to the wasteful and inappropriate use of water by those living within the basin. We use water at a rate two-to-three times higher than in many other developed countries.

In June 2001 the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec and the eight Great Lakes Governors signed an *Annex* to the Great Lakes Charter. The *Annex* committed the provincial and state governments to strengthen the protection of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin waters through a binding, common, resource-based standard to evaluate proposed water withdrawals, diversions and consumptive uses. The *Annex* also sets the pathway for enhanced decision-making through the review of larger water taking proposals by a basin-wide body and through sharing of water use information.

The standards are to embody the following principles:

- New projects and expanded uses must include all reasonably feasible water conservation measures.
- No new project or expanded existing use can cause significant harm – individually or in combination with other projects – to the Great Lakes, their tributaries, or the people and wildlife they support.
- Larger projects or expanded uses must be designed to actually improve the condition of the Great Lakes and their tributary waters, including groundwater. Avoiding harm is not enough in these cases.

The Great Lakes jurisdictions have promised to release for public review draft rules being developed under *Annex 2001* in summer 2004. Once approved, each province and state will be obliged to adjust their water taking standards to be at least as strong as these standards.

In December 2002 the Canadian Federal Government passed legislation aimed at prohibiting bulk removal of boundary waters out of their water basins. One of these basins is the Great Lakes basin. The legislation gives the Minister of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade discretion over bulk water removals.

#### What needs to be done?

- ✓ Push for strong basin-wide standards for water taking permits under Annex 2001.
- ✓ Amend Ontario's legislation to ensure that the standards are at least as strong in Ontario as the standards developed under Annex 2001.
- ✓ Monitor and take action on water taking proposals in other Great Lakes jurisdictions to ensure that they do not harm the Great Lakes and do not set dangerous precedents.
- ✓ Set an example in Ontario and Canada by implementing programmes that dramatically reduce water consumption.

#### Great Lakes for the Future



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