

West Coast Environmental Law



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It Takes a Whole Community Pulling Together

8 June, 2010

(Community Values Drive Responsible Waste and Resource Management)

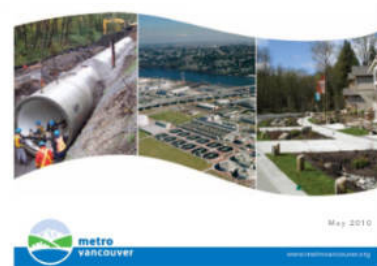
On May 21, 2010, Metro Vancouver adopted the **Integrated Liquid Waste and Resource Management Plan**

(<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/ILWRMP.pdf>), an updated plan for managing the region's wastewater (generated by homes, businesses and industry), and rainwater and snowmelt runoff. The plan has been billed as “**precedent setting** (<http://www.waterbucket.ca/wcp/?sid=74&id=738&type=single>)”:

Two years in the making, the Plan establishes the framework for moving beyond regulatory compliance to transitioning Metro Vancouver to an approach where management of liquid discharges and rainwater resources is planned and implemented within a broader, sustainability framework.

(www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/ILWRMP.pdf) West Coast Environmental Law made an important contribution to the development of this precedent-setting Plan, as a member of the 10-member advisory Liquid Waste Management Plan Reference Panel (an advisory panel set up to report directly to the Metro Board). The plan still needs to be adopted by Metro Vancouver's members, and approved by the Ministry of Environment before it will have legal effect.

I, along with the other members of the Panel, reviewed successive draft Plans and made key recommendations on how the Board could use its liquid waste plan to advance important regional (environmental, community and responsible fiscal) goals and commitments set out in Metro's **Sustainability Framework** (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/MV-SustainabilityFramework.pdf>).



The draft Plan has substantially improved since the first draft, and West Coast was pleased that most of the Reference Panel recommendations were incorporated. With each new draft, the Reference Panel witnessed the Plan becoming clearer and more likely to deliver on its sustainability mission.

The Iona Island and Lion's Gate Treatment Plants

In recent months, the Reference Panel also witnessed a deepening of the Board's commitment to tackle the tough challenge of upgrading both the Iona Island and the Lion's Gate wastewater treatment plans. At one point it looked as if Metro Vancouver Board might balk at the cost of upgrading these plants by 2020.

- The Iona Island Wastewater Plant, located in Richmond, is a **primary treatment plant** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewage_treatment#Primary_treatment) discharging wastewater into the Strait of Georgia. Both the Province and Metro Vancouver have long planned to upgrade it by 2020.
- The Lion's Gate Wastewater Plant, located in West Vancouver, under the Lion's Gate Bridge, is also a primary treatment plant, and services the North Shore communities. Because of a change in federal regulations part-way through the current Plan review process, this plant was suddenly given a higher priority for upgrade – and scheduled for a 2020 upgrade date.

The Reference Panel had urged the Board to commit to upgrading both the Iona Island and Lion's Gate treatment plants by 2020

(<http://wcel.org/resources/new-at-westcoast/west-coast-serves-metro-vancouver%E2%80%99s-liquid-waste-management-reference-pan>), but with the estimated total price tag at \$1.4 billion, the Board was hesitant to commit to tackling too large a financial commitment in too short a time span - unless the senior governments would commit to a shared 1/3 – 1/3 financing plan. The senior governments have so far refused to make such commitments, despite a **public campaign** asking the Canadian Government to commit fund (http://www.georgiastrait.org/urgent-action-message-form.php?urgent=sewage_treatment2010) S.

In January 2010 the Reference Panel explained the urgency for upgrading both plants (<http://wcel.org/sites/default/files/file-downloads/January%202010%20Comments%20of%20the%20Metro%20Vancouver%20Liquid%20Waste%20Management%20Plan%20Reference%20Panel%20to%20the%20Board%20Finance%20Committee%20on%20Financing%20Implications%20of%20Two%20Treat>) :

With each day that passes, Metro Vancouver is discharging an increasing complex array of toxic chemicals into our oceans, underscoring the need for early action....The Reference Panel believes that Iona Island and Lions Gate are both high risk facilities.

The Reference Panel continued to press the Board and region to maintain their commitment to upgrade Iona Island treatment plant by 2020 or as soon thereafter as feasible, to protect the Strait of Georgia, the Fraser River Estuary and all of the species that call these waters home and depend upon the ocean's and river's health.

In the final plan (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/ILWRMP.pdf>), Metro committed to upgrading Lion's Gate treatment plant by 2020 and Iona Island's plant as soon as possible after 2020. Metro has also stated it will be expecting and seeking senior government financing that reflects the senior governments' shared responsibility to keep West Coast waters unpolluted and sustainable for human and other populations.

Other precedent-setting features

Apart from the water treatment plant debate, the Plan (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/ILWRMP.pdf>) is otherwise precedent-setting in a number of ways, including:

- Committing to integrate resource recovery into planned infrastructure and operations. Integrating resource recovery means re-framing waste management challenges to see liquid "waste" streams as a resource rather than a waste, and planning infrastructure so as to recover resources like heat and biogas energy sources, as well as valuable nutrients (e.g. phosphorous which is increasingly short supply world-wide) and the water resource itself from those streams;
- Promising, when possible, to prevent pollution at source;
- Clearly identifying roles and responsibilities (federal, provincial, local government, First Nations and homeowners, businesses, institutions and crown corporations) in relation to the achievement of each strategy. This includes recognizing the need to commit to addressing problems caused by private property sewer connections and private storm water management systems.
- Making explicit links and connections between its policies and current provincial environmental policies, such as provincial integrated resource recovery objectives, the BC Climate Action Plan, the BC Energy Plan, the Living Water Smart Plan, and Green Choices for land use planning and infrastructure. Such policy alignment is one of the keys to the Plan's anticipated likely success.

Interested in learning more? Stay tuned to **Metro Vancouver for reports** (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/wastewater/planning/Pages/default.aspx>) on how well Metro is meeting its Plan commitments: the Reference Panel is pleased to report that a new independent committee – the Integrated Utility Management Advisory Committee - will be struck to monitor the Plan's ongoing implementation, especially vis-à-vis integrated planning and resource recovery across utility systems.



By Susan Rutherford. Susan Rutherford is a former West Coast Staff Counsel and represented West Coast Environmental Law on the Reference Panel. West Coast Environmental Law thanks Susan for contributing this guest blog post.

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