

Addressing First Nations' Concerns in Water Sharing Agreements

Student: Cynthia Huo

Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Alcantara



Water sharing agreements are a potential solution to the issue of ongoing water insecurity in First Nations' communities. They involve a First Nation connecting their water system to that of a nearby municipality, and paying that municipality a fee for water provision (Lipka and Deaton 2015).

What are the concerns?

1. Capacity

First Nations may not have sufficient financial resources to effectively implement agreements and to maintain the regular payments to the municipality (Landon 2020).

2. Cultural Protection

There is a stark contrast in the ways that First Nations and non-First Nations communities view the role and importance of water (McGregor 2014).

3. Sovereignty

Entering into water sharing agreements can be seen as an impediment to Indigenous nation-building efforts (White, Murphy, and Spence 2012).

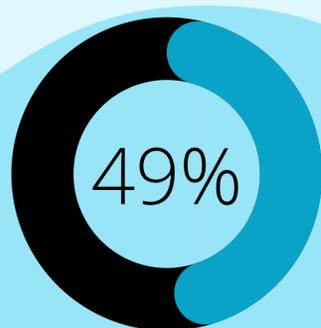
Research Question:

How well do water sharing agreements address First Nations' concerns relating to capacity, cultural protection, and sovereignty?

Methods

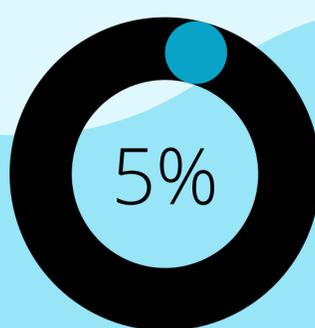
54 existing water sharing agreements were analyzed and coded according to whether they included provisions that responded well to the three categories of concerns.

What did we find?



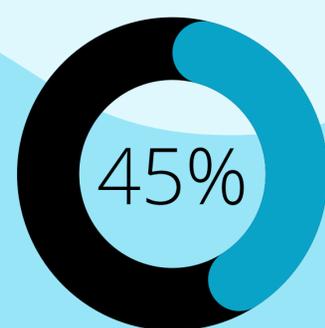
Capacity

We found that 49% of agreements included provisions that would assuage capacity concerns, such as ones that allow for bulk billing, future rate negotiations, or funding for initial capital costs.



Cultural Protection

We found that 5% of agreements included provisions that recognize the distinct, special relationship that First Nations have with water.



Sovereignty

We found that 45% of agreements included provisions that would assuage sovereignty concerns, such as ones that recognize Indigenous rights, prevent unilateral water supply cut-off, allow for free usage, or include mechanisms of joint governance.

Discussion and Next Steps

- Most of the questions asked were not found in the agreements, which explains the hesitancy of some First Nations in entering into agreements.
- More analysis of coding results to be done, to find more trends and patterns.
- Important for action to be taken in implementing these changes to new agreements, as the water crisis in First Nations communities remains ongoing.



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Alcantara for making my involvement in this project a possibility, and for being an amazing mentor. I would also like to thank Philip Charbonneau for guiding me through the coding process and analysis of the results. Special thanks as well to the wonderful team at Western Research, Western Libraries, and Student Experience, who made USRI an incredible learning experience.

References

- Landon, Will. "Opinion: The Cost of Water" Kenora Miner & News. Published September 24, 2020. <https://www.kenoraminerandnews.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-the-cost-of-water/wcm/3cfb623a-971c-4621-924d-94c0514ef6ff>
- Lipka, Bethany, and B. James Deaton. 2015. "Do Water Service Provision Contracts with Neighbouring Communities Reduce Drinking Water Risk on Canadian Reserves?" *Water Resources and Economics*, 11: pp. 22-32. doi:10.1016/j.wre.2015.08.002.
- McGregor, Deborah. 2014. "Traditional Knowledge and Water Governance: The Ethic of Responsibility." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous People* 10(5): 493-507. doi:10.1177/117718011401000505.
- White, Jerry, Laura Murphy and Nicholas Spence. 2012. "Water and Indigenous Peoples: Canada's Paradox." *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 3(3): 1-25. doi:10.18584/iipj.2012.3.3.3.