

Board of Directors

November 30, 2020

To the Committee Members,

The Ontario Environment Network supports the broad outcry for the withdrawal on Schedules 6 and 8 of Bill 229, with key perspectives provided by scores of organizations across the social spectrum and multiple submissions with thousands of signatures.

In addition to supporting the proposed withdrawals, we are most concerned about serious terms being whispered as the Ontario government is facilitating all kinds of development over both environmental protection and democratic engagement. The terms include short-sighted, closed-minded, favouring special interests, and anti-democratic.

The list of concerns generated since the election of the Ford government in June 2018 is staggering. Extensive reductions in regulatory protection and/or resources for aggregates, biodiversity, conservation authorities, environmental assessment, flooding, natural heritage, source protection, species at risk, and urban development.

With respect to urban development, the government has in just 29 months amended the Provincial Policy Statement a number of times, without any of the required reports, and pushed a multi-pronged Housing Action Plan for which the government provided no scientific basis in spite of repeated requests.

And it is currently proposing more unacceptable changes to conservation authorities and forestry, without sufficient consultation, in schedules 6 and 8 of Bill 229.

Worse, like many past efforts, Bill 229 is yet another omnibus bill, and in particular a budget bill with urgent timelines. Bill 229 will have no public meetings, will not include meaningful discussion at a standing committee, and indeed it has already been announced that discussion in the legislature will be limited.

At a time when global experts are suggesting that the old economy may never return after the pandemic and that this is an extraordinary opportunity to “build back better”, the Ontario government seems more interested in a 1950s approach to development and democracy than in crafting a vision for a sustainable future based on meaningful consultation.

This approach ignores science and appears to be willing to sacrifice both the environment and democracy for private gain - at the expense of Ontario’s natural heritage, clean water, a sustainable economy, and public health.

We urge the government to withdraw schedules 6 and 8 from Bill 229 and abandon executive government through omnibus legislation, and to do so before the whispers become a roar or, worse, a lament.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alex Keenan', with a stylized, flowing script.

Alex Keenan

Vice President
Ontario Environment Network