

December 2, 2020

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

99 Wellesley Street West Room 1405, Whitney Block

Queen's Park Toronto, ON

M7A1A2

Re: Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020

I am writing as a concerned member of the public to express my opposition to Schedule 6 and Schedule 8 of Bill 229. I am not one to normally participate in political issues (this is my first time submitting a comment like this), but I strongly feel that it is very important that the government reconsiders these aspects of the budget bill.

I want to start by acknowledging that COVID 19 has put us all in a difficult position and I completely understand that the government has to make hard choices to put us back on the road to economic recovery. This is much is clear. There is no easy route to do this and I commend the Ford government's efforts so far at listening to the science when it comes to COVID and doing as much as possible to keep the spread of the virus under control, while also balancing the need to keep our economy on track.

However, we are not only dealing with a public health crisis, but also a crisis related to our environment – and this also plays into public health. Now more than ever, maintaining good water quality is so important to our present and future generations. The Conservation Authorities help bring scientists to the table of decision making to make sure that municipalities are as informed as possible about how we are effecting the water around us.

By limiting their scope and authority, we are risking sidelining evidence-based decisions. This could have a serious impact on our future and our future generations.

The environment is often dismissed as just some “lefty” issue that is out of touch with what taxpayers are concerned about, but this is not the case.

It is taxpayers who have to foot the bill to upgrade water treatment plants, which are under more and more strain when wetlands are developed. Conserving lands and wetlands with water health in mind not only presents enormous recreation opportunities to people from all walks and life (fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, hiking), but helps save money down the line by keeping our waters in a decent enough state that we won't have to cough up billions to restore them. It is actually costs the public more to develop them than to protect them. The risk of flooding is also going to be a bigger and bigger issue in the future, and CAs need to be able to provide evidence to help municipalities deal with this proactively. This is already something that has hit places like Toronto and the CAs can help us stay ahead of the game when it comes to tackling these problems head-on.

Around the world cities and countries are scrambling to deal with water problems. We are so lucky to live in a country with a lot of water, but we are also lucky to live in a Province that had the foresight to set up the Conservation Authorities fifty years ago. This is something that makes me proud to live in Ontario. Also, during COVID, I have been so grateful for the lands that the

CAs manage. When everything else is shut down , it is great to have these places that families can go to get out of the house while remaining safe and socially distant.

The conservation authorities make sure that planning and decisions that affect the water are done in a science-based manner that takes into account the impacts on the water. I have carefully listened to the response from the government that this act will not have significant impacts on the environment, and I have not been convinced by this at all.

Similarly, forestry should not be exempted from the *Endangered Species Act*. These changes could impact the biodiversity of the province. Again, we should be moving in the opposite direction and doing everything we can to protect biodiversity at this critical moment. Ontarians love our forests, our animals, and our wildlands. We are proud of the wilderness our Province offers. It is wrong to sacrifice the health of our environment and put biodiversity at risk. We can't keep fixing today's problems by making the problems of the future worse.

The response from the government so far that I have heard is that it will not have much of an impact. If the government actually believes this, and if it does not make a difference either way, then why does it need to be included in the Budget Bill in the first place?

I ask that the government please remove Schedule 6 and Schedule 8 from Bill 229.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Edward Millar

Toronto