



December 1, 2020

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

<https://www.ola.org/en/apply-committees>

Re: Comments on Schedule #6, Bill 229 - Proposed Amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO Estb.1923) joins Conservation Authorities, several significant environmental groups, hundreds of Municipalities and many thousands of individual Ontarians who oppose the Government's proposed Bill 229 Schedule #6 Amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act, and have requested that they be removed. **1.** Should the Standing Committee members agree to this, PCWO also requests that they recommend any subsequent government proposals regarding the Conservation Authorities Act be subject to the Environmental Bill of Rights Legislation and processes, and that there be broad, transparent public consultations.

PCWO makes these requests on the basis of our research, education and advocacy regarding environmental protections for close to 100 years, on such important resource issues as soil erosion and degradation, preservation of tree cover, ground water contamination, forest resources and management, endangered species, preservation of Ontario wetlands, and strengthening of the Ontario Environmental Assessment process. **2.**

Underlying all of PCWO's environmental policies is the importance of ensuring that the government of the day uses the "*precautionary principle*" to protect Ontario's treasured environmental resources over the long term. Given the huge groundswell of opposition to Bill 229's proposed weakening of environmental protections, it is obvious that the public not only sees the legislation as a huge and historic step backwards, but definitely values the key precautionary role Conservation Authorities play in protecting Ontario's urban and rural watersheds from deforestation, wetland loss, poor water quality and flooding.

PCWO is also aware that Conservation Authorities, with their science-based precautionary approach, and in partnership with many municipalities, have continued to do their job well. This is despite a drastic cut of Provincial funding in 1995 from \$50 million to \$8 million, a removal of educational programming from their mandate in 2019, and, having to deal with the fallout from Bill 197 (Omnibus Bill COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act) enacted on July 21, 2020, wherein the Forestry industry was made exempt from Environmental Assessments.

To conclude, PCWO urges the Standing Committee to consider this regressive and potentially extremely damaging legislation in the context of the current climate - warming crisis and the need for resilient communities in the immediate future. Ontario, like jurisdictions world-wide, will experience dramatic environmental changes and require all the regulatory strength possible to ameliorate them.

Therefore, an even stronger Conservation Authority role in land use planning is vital. Not only will their planning and regulatory efforts protect and enhance key eco-systems now, but in the future, they will help millions of residents in 36 watershed areas benefit from Ontario's priceless natural areas, which store carbon, prevent erosion and soil runoff into the Great Lakes, lower temperatures in extreme hot weather, cool streams and help prevent flooding and fires.

Edeltraud Neal, President NCWC

Prepared by Gracia Janes PCWO VP Environment gracia.janes@bellnet.ca

REFERENCES:

1. Examples of Groups, Municipalities and others supporting Conservation Authorities and opposing Schedule #6 Bill 229
 - *The Association of Ontario Municipalities
 - *Conservation Ontario - representing 36 Ontario Conservation Authorities, *
 - *The Canadian Environmental Law Association,
 - *Ontario Nature
 - *Environmental Defence
 - *Federation of Ontario Cottagers
 - * Mississauga Residents Association
 - *David Crombie, Chair of the Greenbelt Council
 - *Regions, Cities & Towns, by Resolutions and Letters, such as Mississauga, Bradford, West Gwillimbury, King City, Ottawa, Niagara Region
 - Niagara-on-the-Lake

2. Examples of Policies used in Briefs to the Government at PCW yearly Semi-Annual November meetings at Queens Park, and in subsequent presentations to Standing Committees, and letters to Government :

Soil Erosion and Degradation, (1983) Preservation of Tree Cover (1991) Ground Water Contamination (1985) Forest Resources and Management (1989) Lands for Life (12% Forest Cover) (1998) Endangered Species Act ((2015) Preservation of Ontario Wetlands(1985) , Ontario Plans for sustainable Development (2017) Strengthening the Ontario Environmental Assessment process (2009).