

Monica Hawkins

From: Minister, MECP (MECP) <Minister.MECP@ontario.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, July 8, 2020 7:10 PM
To: Monica Hawkins
Subject: Letter from the Honourable Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks regarding Environmental Assessment modernization

Good evening,

I am writing to inform you about the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks next steps in our government's Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan commitment to build an environmental assessment (EA) program that ensures strong environmental oversight and a strong economy.

The current process for environmental assessments is slow and ineffective. It can take up to six years for some projects, slowing down important infrastructure projects that help Ontario communities, such as installing electricity infrastructure. Even projects subject to a streamlined process, such as new roads and bridges, can be further delayed by administrative burden, impacting the timely construction of basic infrastructure.

That's why, last year our government released a [discussion paper](https://prod-environmental-registry.s3.amazonaws.com/2019-04/EA%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf) (<https://prod-environmental-registry.s3.amazonaws.com/2019-04/EA%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf>) outlining the challenges with our current framework and introducing our vision for a modernized EA program, as the first step in our plan to update the nearly 50-year-old *Environmental Assessment Act* (EAA).

As we committed in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, we want to improve the environmental assessment program by eliminating duplication and reducing delays on projects that matter most to Ontario communities. To start, we amended the EAA through the *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019* to exempt low-impact projects, such as constructing roadside parks and adding bike lanes from requiring an environmental assessment. Projects like these are routine activities that have benefits to communities but little to no environmental impacts.

As part of our government's proposed COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, we are now proposing to move forward with the next phase of environmental assessment modernization, to further reduce delays and focus our resources on projects with a higher potential for environmental impacts so that we can help communities get important infrastructure projects built faster, while maintaining strong environmental oversight.

Building infrastructure projects faster, including transit and highways, will help boost Ontario's economic recovery, create thousands of jobs, put more opportunities within the reach of businesses, create more affordable housing, and ensure a higher standard of living in every community across the province.

The proposal includes the items outlined below:

Proposed amendments to the *Environmental Assessment Act* (EAA)

Through the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, our government has proposed amendments to the EAA, which allow us to move forward with our next phase of our modernization plans, while at the

same time supporting the government economic recovery goals by making it possible for us to find efficiencies in the environmental assessment process of important public works.

The legislation would allow us, through subsequent regulations and proclamations, to allow online submissions, reduce the average time by half for the largest projects and match the potential environmental impact of a project to the level of study required.

The proposed changes are aimed at getting important infrastructure projects built faster, while maintaining strong environmental oversight by focusing on projects that have the most potential to impact the environment.

We posted an information notice on the environmental registry to provide information about the proposed legislative changes to the EAA that will be proceeding through the legislative process. Please refer to <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2051> for more information.

Amendments to Class Environmental Assessments (Class EAs)

My ministry is also seeking input on proposed amendments to 8 Class EAs. These proposed changes would support our modernization initiative as they would exempt low-impact projects from the requirements of the *Environmental Assessment Act*, eliminate duplication and find efficiencies in the planning process. This would speed up projects that are important to communities, such as erosion, repair, or remediation initiatives, or important upgrades to machinery such as waterpower generators.

My ministry is seeking input on these proposed amendments during a **45-day** comment period, closing on **August 22, 2020**. Details of this proposal may be found at <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1712>.

Exempting Regulations

In addition, my ministry is also proposing regulatory exemptions from the *Environmental Assessment Act* to eliminate duplication and reduce delays for projects and activities related to Indigenous land claim settlements and other agreements with Indigenous communities dealing with land, projects within provincial parks and conservation reserves, and select highway projects being planned by the Ministry of Transportation. Some of these projects and activities are already subject to other legislation or planning processes that would provide the appropriate level of assessment and consultation. Other projects may be exempted from the EAA but would still be subject to conditions such as requirements to post notifications or undertake technical studies as appropriate.

My ministry is seeking input on these proposed amendments during a **45-day** comment period, closing on **August 22, 2020**.

For details of the proposal regarding land claim settlement activities and other agreements with Indigenous communities dealing with land, please refer to <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1805>.

For details of the proposal regarding projects in provincial parks and conservation reserves please refer to <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1804>.

For details of the proposals for select Ministry of Transportation projects, please refer to <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882> and <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1883>.

Information about the proposed Class EA amendments can be found on the environmental registry. We ask that you submit any comments that you may have through the instructions provided, and by the deadlines listed above.

Should you have questions about any of the proposals, you can contact us at EAmmodernization.MECP@ontario.ca.

We look forward to your suggestions and comments on our modernization initiatives.

Sincerely,

Jeff Yurek
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks