



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Environmental Assessment Process Has Not Kept Up With the Times: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Current processes for assessing the environmental impact of projects and plans in Ontario are not in line with best practices in Canada and internationally, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2016 Annual Report*.

Environmental assessments identify stakeholder concerns, and measures to prevent or mitigate negative environmental impacts before a project or plan proceeds. The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is responsible for overseeing the environmental assessment process.

Ontario is the only province that generally requires no environmental assessments for private-sector projects in, for example, mining and chemical manufacturing, which have had, and can have extensive long-term impacts.

“Taxpayers could be impacted financially, as the province may eventually have to pay to clean up these projects,” Lysyk said today after tabling the Report in the Legislature.

“Of the 10 contaminated sites with the largest provincial rehabilitation cost, four are former private sector mineral extraction sites. The province is facing a total estimated rehabilitation cost for these sites of \$968 million.”

Under the 40-year-old Environmental Assessment Act (Act), Ontario requires assessments to be carried out for public-sector projects, because some can have extensive and long-term effects on the environment, wild-life and human populations. Electricity generation and transmission, waste management and large municipal infrastructure are the only private-sector projects covered by the Act.

However, the Act does not say which types of public-sector plans and projects must be assessed, and the government sometimes enacts other legislation to exempt certain plans from assessment altogether. This means that significant long-term government initiatives have been implemented without assessing their full impact. In reaction to renewable energy projects being exempt from environmental assessment requirements, 92 municipalities in Ontario passed resolutions as unwilling hosts to wind farm developments.

Other significant findings in the Report include:

- Other than streamlined assessments for forest management plans, no other provincial environmental assessments have been completed for any government plan or program in the last 20 years.
- Public consultation and the extent of the required assessment for a particular project are often based on its size, scale and cost, not its potential environmental impact. The Ministry often provides insufficient information about projects, making it difficult for the public to participate knowledgeably in the process.
- Ontario environmental assessments do not consider the cumulative effects of past, present and planned activities in an area. This can lead to projects proceeding in places that are already subject to significant environmental stress.

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