



# News Release

For Immediate Release

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## Ontario Government has Deliberately Ignored the Public's Right to be Heard on Significant Environmental Issues: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Some Ontario ministries – including the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks – deliberately avoided consulting the public on environmentally significant decisions in 2020/21, bypassing the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *Annual Report of Environment Audits*.

“The Environment Ministry’s actions amount to undermining the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, a law that we would expect the Ministry to be championing,” Lysyk said, “This has been consistent over the last three years.”

The law provides Ontarians with rights to information and public consultation on environmentally significant decisions, and the right to ask for a review or to appeal environmental decisions. These rights are enshrined in law, similar to human rights, employment rights and French language rights.

The report cites cases where the government ignored those rights. The government, for example, failed to consult the public on changes to the *Environmental Assessment Act* by passing legislation to retroactively exempt the Ministry from that requirement. There was also no consultation under the *Environmental Bill of Rights* about changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* because the government included the changes in a budget bill.

In another case, it was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing who violated the *Environmental Bill of Rights*. There was no public consultation about amendments that enhanced the Minister’s power to issue Minister’s Zoning Orders (MZOs). MZOs are used to bypass local land-use planning recommendations, public consultation and approvals for development projects.

“We also found that some ministries, while not technically violating the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, made environmentally significant decisions, and the public should have had a voice. The Environment Ministry should be taking an appropriate leadership role, to ensure the public’s right to information and consultation in provincial government decision-making that affects the environment.” said Tyler Schulz, Assistant Auditor General and Commissioner of the Environment in the Office.

This audit report includes 61 recommendations for improvement.

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