



Comments to Legislative Committee re Bill 66 – The Great Lakes Protection Act

Good morning and thank you for giving us this opportunity to appear before you in support of Bill 66, The Great Lakes Protections Act.

My name is Bob Duncanson. I am the Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Association. The Georgian Bay Association is an umbrella group representing 19 community associations along the eastern and northern shores of Georgian Bay stretching from Honey Harbour to the North Channel. We have been advocating on behalf of our landowning members since 1916. We represent 3200 properties and approximately 18,000 individuals.

The Great Lakes Region is of immense importance to Ontario, Canada and North America. In 2011, the economic output for the region was \$4.7 trillion US, placing it amongst the largest economic regions in the world. One of the main engines behind this economic success is the water in the Great Lakes. The 5 Great Lakes combined contain the earth's second largest single supply of surface fresh water.

In the Georgian Bay context property owners alone contribute over \$100 million to the local, provincial and federal economies annually through taxes and goods and services purchased. When you add in campers, boaters and fishermen to this mix the number becomes significantly larger.

Without water in sufficient quantity and quality this economic input would be threatened. The Great Lakes are Ontario's Golden Geese. It is critical to our future well being that we nurture them and protect them so they will keep giving back.

The Great Lakes are indeed under great and unprecedented stress.

Climate change is resulting in major impacts in precipitation and evaporation in the Great Lakes basin. One in one hundred year storms are now occurring frequently playing havoc with municipal infrastructure and the upstream watersheds that feed the Great Lakes. Water levels have whipsawed from a record low in 2013 to above average two years later. Climate experts tell us that we can expect more of what we have seen over the past few years which are torrential downpours interspersed with prolonged periods of drought. As a society we need to get a lot better at anticipating and preparing for the impacts of Climate Change in order to protect the Great Lakes.

Water quality is a growing concern. While the Blue Green Algae in Lake Erie has captured a lot of attention of late you may not realize that there are regular outbreaks of Blue Green Algae in other parts of the Great Lakes including relatively pristine Georgian Bay. Excess phosphorous has been identified as the fuel feeding these outbreaks. Further research is needed to figure out ways to prevent this.

Terrestrial and aquatic invasive species are bringing their own challenges. Phragmites, Eurasian Milfoil, Japanese Tangle Weed, Zebra and Quagga Mussels and Round Gobis to name a few. There is a perfect storm brewing below the placid surface waters of the Great Lakes including Georgian Bay.

What also worries us are chemicals of emerging concern. Class IV septic systems, like those used by most cottagers, and municipal treatment facilities, have not been designed to treat or eliminate many chemicals that are in the human waste stream. Chemical compounds from pharmaceuticals and many household products pass right through these systems and into our water bodies. No one knows what the impact will be as these accumulate in nature and interact with one another. We need to get much better at understanding and managing chemicals in our waste stream before we poison our lakes beyond the point of no return.

The Georgian Bay Association operates in a part of the Province where there are no Conservation Authorities, no Source Water Protection Committees and where municipalities have limited capacity to initiate, let alone run, programs that will protect the Great Lakes. Most initiatives of this kind are initiated by property owners working through Non Government

organizations like ours. We believe that the Great Lake Protection Act, with its Guardian Council and Geographically Focussed Initiatives, will provide a framework that will improve citizen engagement with government at all levels and help us to be more proactive in our efforts to protect our part of the Lakes.

Some detractors may argue that the Great Lakes are a bi-national resource and therefore it should be up to the federal government to do the heavy lifting on this file. In reality we need all levels of government, together with non government organizations and the public at large, to work together on protecting the Great Lakes. This is how it works in the US and it works well. I have heard other detractors state that the Province has sufficient pieces of legislation in place to do what Bill 66 is proposing. With respect I counter that the various Provincial Ministries as a whole lack a Great Lakes focus. Bill 66 will align priorities and decision making across Ministries and even start to set targets, all of which will give "Protection of the Great Lakes" the profile it deserves.

Our hope is that you, as legislators, will support the Great Lakes Protection Act to help protect this life sustaining resource for many generations to come.