

# FRIENDS OF THE TAY WATERSHED

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Hon. Rod Phillips  
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks  
11<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ferguson Block  
77 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, ON, M7A 2T5

Subject: Local Conservation Authorities

Reference: Letter of November 9, 2018 from MPP Randy Hillier, regarding the Conservation Authorities Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.C.27

Minister Phillips:

This association wishes to comment on the referenced letter of November 9<sup>th</sup> from MPP Randy Hillier recommending a reduction in the mandate for Ontario Conservation Authorities (CAs) under the referenced Act.

Mr. Hillier cites a general principal that “*Government entities ought to be constructed and empowered to serve the taxpayer*”.

We would point out that, under Part II of the Act, Conservation Authorities are created by the request of municipal councils to the Minister to “establish a conservation authority and designate the municipalities that are the participating municipalities and the area over which the authority has jurisdiction.” Clearly, since a municipal government is as close to the taxpayer as one can get, it follows that Conservation Authorities “are empowered to serve the taxpayer “ and are much more an entity of the local municipal government than of a more remote provincial government.

Based on this, it would appear that Mr. Hillier, as an MPP of Ontario rather than a municipal Councillor, has no grounds or authority for even raising this matter.

Mr. Hillier asserts that it would be in the best interests of our taxpayers and the environment to repeal Item 3, “Memorandum of Understanding with Municipalities”, from the list of programs and services that the authority is required or permitted to provide (Section 21.1 ) Of all the programs and services the authority is mandated to provide, Item 3 is the only one not mandated by regulation; that is, it is the only one available at the option of the municipality (read local taxpayer). By requesting its repeal, Mr. Hillier is

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effectively promoting a reduction in the taxpayers' involvement in our area's watershed management.

The arguments presented by Mr. Hillier seriously understate the essential services that are being provided to this community by our local CAs. They also indicate a substantial lack of understanding of water resource management by expert organisations in rural communities. The CAs in this region provide a broad range of needed information, technical advisory services and programs to both the public and government agencies, which are not available from any other single source.

More specifically, the letter from MPP Hillier states:

- ***That the CAs have 'remodeled themselves to serve (only) other government agencies and entities'.***

This is not correct. The CAs provide a broad package of programs directed specifically to the public, including Land Owner Information Centre; Lake Management Planning Services; lake and stream quality testing; information publications on water and related resources; City and Rural Clean Water Program; and cooperation on community water-awareness building events and projects.

CAs also deliver important services to municipalities, such as floodplain mapping, water quality monitoring, septic system inspection, Source Water Protection, and review services for hazard lands, shoreline protection and water level response.

- ***That CAs have demonstrated 'conflict of interest', 'incompetence that borders on negligence' and 'false technical advice'.***

Mr. Hillier provides no supporting facts. The staff of these agencies are highly qualified experts in their fields, who habitually receive commendation from both the public and other experts for their technical advice and assistance. If these charges came from someone other than an MPP there would be cause for civil action. Taxpayers deserve and expect a higher-level of representation than this from their MPP.

- ***That the CAs 'fail to meet their obligations'.***

Most independent citizen groups in the community, such as lake associations, depend heavily on the expertise and water management services provided by CAs. For example, The Friends of the Tay Watershed Association relies heavily on the technology and hands-on services provided by the CAs for delivering our water protection programs in the Tay watershed. CA support and guidance are critical to the effective management of the water resources in this community. Without the

information that has been developed by our CAs, and the guidance in using it, we would effectively be “working blind.”

- ***That CAs have ‘expanded their authority to include the management of insignificant wetlands’.***

This statement is not only untrue, it indicates the serious lack of understanding of the management of water resources. More seriously, it shows a complete disregard for the purpose of the Conservation Authorities Act itself. Impartial organisations, including the University of Waterloo, report that wetlands of all sizes play a crucial role in flood prevention and drought mitigation. Mr. Hillier has actively worked to stop the effort to protect them in this watershed, effectively derailing an important tool for flood control. Conservation Authorities are mandated to protect all wetlands. It is true that, due to low funding, CAs in eastern Ontario have only regulated Provincially Significant Wetlands for many years. However, elsewhere, thirty-three of the 36 provincial CAs regulate all wetlands.

In closing, Mr. Hillier’s proposal would not only increase costs to municipalities, but place in jeopardy the proper management and protection of water resources for both rural and urban developed areas in Ontario. On the one hand, hiring private consultants to provide review of such services, such as stormwater management, will increase the cost of development for our municipalities. On the other hand, it removes an option from municipalities for how they wish to receive these services. This would come at a time when our area has experienced unprecedented challenges from such sources as drought and floods, and, in some cases, poorly managed development. The Cas’ work provides a first line of defence against these hazards.

Reduced protection for provincial water resources led directly to the Walkerton disaster many years ago, a legacy that presumably no government would wish to repeat.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

David Taylor  
President

The "Friends of the Tay Watershed" is an association of residents, associations, NGOs and government organizations, founded in 2001 by the community to ensure the ongoing care of the water and related resources of the 95 km. long Tay watershed in eastern Ontario. This includes the Tay River, Tay Canal – a UNESCO World Heritage Site with the Rideau system - numerous tributary streams, and over 45 lakes. The watershed crosses seven municipalities and three Counties (Lanark, Frontenac and Leeds Grenville).