



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Water Quality and Viability of Great Lakes Suffers at Hands of Conservative Incompetence:
Stakeholders Speak Out**

WINDSOR- Brian Masse MP Windsor West and NDP Great Lakes Critic is raising concerns about the continuing delays in negotiations over a new Canada- Ontario Agreement (COA) with respect to the Great Lakes, despite the last agreement (signed in 2007) expiring more than a year ago. The COA is a cost sharing agreement and is essential for Canada to meet its bi-national commitments with the US, which includes priorities for the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. The most recent of these bi-national agreements is the Great Lakes Water Quality Protocol 2012, and includes timelines for deliverables outlined in the document.

“Here we have yet another instance of the federal government entering into an international agreement and failing to hold up their end of the bargain. While the US has a plan to implement protocol 2012, Canada is lagging behind and communities along the Great Lakes are paying the price,” stated Masse.

The first annex of the 2012 protocol focuses on Areas of Concern, which has included the Detroit River since the first bi-national agreement was signed in 1971. In a letter to Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq, Masse expressed his disappointment that the federal government allowed the COA to expire without a replacement agreement, despite concerns from former Environment Minister Peter Kent about the possibility of this happening.

Several environmental organizations also expressed their concerns with the delays in a letter to Minister Aglukkaq this past August. Executive director of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers Association (FOCA), Terry Rees stated that “without a signed COA, the important restoration and protection work on Georgian Bay’s coastal wetlands, Severn Sound, Rondeau Bay, and elsewhere is at risk. The long term remedial action on degraded areas including the Bay of Quinte, St. Mary’s River, Hamilton harbour and 9 other Canadian hotspots is delayed.” He concluded by stating that the FOCA is “urging the governments of Canada, and Ontario, to finalize the COA immediately, to allow this important work to continue for the sake of our economy, public health, and our freshwater ecosystems.”

The severity of the delays is even causing retired high ranking bureaucrats to speak out. James Bruce, former EDA of what is now Environment Canada and lead negotiator for the federal government during the drafting of the first COA, stated that “It is disturbing to learn that this (the COA) has been allowed to lapse in the face of the 2012 protocol to the international agreement, which has been signed by Canada”.

Masse went on to state that the need for clarity of responsibilities and funding arrangements between Canada and Ontario is becoming dire. He is asking that Minister Aglukkaq and other Ministers involved in the negotiations reach an agreement with their Ontario counterparts and release a draft COA for public consultation by the end of 2013.

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