



May 4, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier  
Room 281 Legislative Building,  
Queen's Park Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier, and to the MPP's listed below,

On behalf of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA), we would like to provide some input and recommendations in relation to the staged reopening of the Province in the wake of COVID-19. We are seeking your leadership and are offering our support towards a responsible and measured reopening of the access to Ontario's waterways, and waterfront communities.

FOCA is the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, a member-based organization representing over 500 local community groups across rural Ontario. Waterfront property owners represent one of the single largest rural constituencies – over 250,000 families, located in hundreds of Ontario municipalities and who collectively own and steward 15,000 kilometers of the Province's shorelines, and over 50,000 hectares of economically and environmentally important lands.

FOCA's mission is *To protect thriving and sustainable waterfronts across Ontario.*

Since the beginning of the pandemic, FOCA has been diligently promoting the messages from public health and the governments of Canada, and Ontario about isolating, essential travel, etc. This was critical during the acute and dangerous onset of the pandemic.

The current situation:

On March 17, 2020, the Government of Ontario declared an emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. The state of emergency has been extended to May 12. On March 24<sup>th</sup> and as revised on April 4<sup>th</sup>, the Province issued orders the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. This Emergency Order, in place until May 6<sup>th</sup>, includes the closure of outdoor amenities in parks and recreational areas, non-essential workplaces, public places and bars and restaurants, along with restrictions on social gatherings. Marinas were considered a non-essential workplace unless they supported access to permanent residences. As of May 4, these facilities were granted a phased-in opening, which should allow them to begin their operations in a safe manner while preparing for a public opening later. This will be vital for these businesses to survive. Some municipalities with public boat launches also closed these facilities.

Eventually, the Province will need to begin rolling back their restrictions but will need to do so in a responsible and thoughtful way to keep us and our communities (waterfront and other) safe.

As we head towards summer, we need to consider how to enable access for people who own water-access properties, and to enable firstly the opening of marinas, but also public boat launches as an early and low-risk easing measure.

There are thousands of property owners in Ontario who are only able to access their properties via watercraft. For these property owners, boats are essential transportation, not just for pleasure. These property owners are currently unable to access their properties to inspect for damage or to meet the vacancy provisions of property insurance policies. Many are rightfully worried about the impact of seasonal or chronic flooding to their properties. There are also thousands of other property owners who utilize the waterways for transportation to work.

### **The Path:**

#### **Marinas**

FOCA has been in discussion with and agrees with, the Boating Ontario Association and their proposed measures which will be used to responsibly allow an easing of restrictions to their sector. This includes the gradual “non-public” opening of marina workplaces, back shops and storage yards, to allow marina staff to prepare for the coming season while safely distancing and minimizing person-to-person contact. A second phase will be the eventual opening of marinas to public use, when an additional set of best practices will be put in place with respect to the access and use of these facilities by the public/customers, again in a COVID-appropriate manner.

***When the time is right, and as part of the Province’s Stage One easing, FOCA believes this phased-in approach for marina openings is an appropriate and necessary course of action.***

#### **Public (municipal) boat launches**

Many municipalities interpreted the provisions of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* to include municipal boat launches, and subsequently closed them. Many other municipalities do NOT consider that boat launches fit in this definition and have cited different arguments for not closing them, including:

- boat launches are not a place where people congregate
- it is important that emergency responders have access to boat launches
- boat launches should remain open for essential purposes such as accessing island or water-access properties
- it is appropriate for the Township to post signs related to distancing and recommending (for instance) no more than one boat at a time and only two people at a time when launching
- the same rules will apply on the lake related to gatherings (no more than 5) and distancing as required elsewhere
- the mental health benefits from outdoor pursuits are important and significant
- if compliance with distancing becomes problematic, the Township, or OPP on request can respond

Similar to the process for marina openings, when public boat launches are opened, it should be under the proviso that these areas are duly posted and that users are practicing personal spacing, not gathering in groups, etc. in accordance with pandemic best practices. For those private property owners whose only access is through boat ramps under Provincial (e.g. Parks) management, an opening plan for these facilities should be simultaneously be implemented.

Over the coming week(s)FOCA will be working public health, the Province and other partners to share not only best practices related to boating, but also explaining COVID safety at the cottage, and in your cottage community.

In conclusion, we believe that in implementing the Province's Framework for Reopening our Province, that the responsible reopening of our marinas, and public boat launches can be a logical consideration in the phased opening of our economy. We believe that by following protective measures, the gradual reopening of marinas, and boating can be done in a manner which meets the Province's goals of public health and safety and achieves the desired balance of the needs of people and businesses. This staged approach can be done in a manner that meets the objective of a responsible reopening of our province.

We appreciate Ontario's diligence and attention to the important and pressing matters of keeping our people safe, and we look forward to helping in our own way to ensure the reopening of the Province will allow us to keep our population healthy, and the economy thriving.

Sincerely,



Marlin Horst, President of the Board



Terry Rees, Executive Director

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cc Key Cabinet Ministers, Opposition Critics, and waterfront riding MPPs:

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