

**Update January 2021:**

[Letter received from the Attorney General re: Ontario's response to northern emergencies](#)

- [Read FOCA's October 2020 email](#) to the Attorney General
- [Read MPP Gélinas' October letter](#), hand-delivered to the Attorney General

**Earlier news on this:** November 2020 – FOCA remains concerned about the state of emergency response in rural and northern Ontario, and recently followed up with the Attorney General, Minister Doug Downey, as we continue to await word about **any changes to emergency response stemming from the Coroner's 2018 report** (see *November 2018 entry, below*). FOCA is in close contact with Nickel Belt MPP France Gélinas, where the 2013 accident occurred; the MPP's office reports that the Minister seems open to the idea of providing a response to the Coroner to speak to the Province's steps to help keep rural and northern residents safer, following this tragic event. Stay tuned.

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**November 2018** – The coroner's inquest into the **2013 fatal boating accident and 911 response at Lake Wanapitei** (see more, including FOCA's 2014 letter, below) **has made 27 recommendations**, including that the province should create an independent body to provide oversight to all 911 operations to investigate, respond to, and resolve complaints. [Read about the recommendations, from CBC News.](#)

October 15, 2018 – [Inquest begins into Ontario's 911 system](#) (CBC)

September 7, 2018 – Coroner's inquest date has finally been set for October 2018, related to 2014 fatal boating accident and 911 response. [Read more here.](#) (Sudbury.com)

December 2014 – An [unfortunate and fatal boating incident](#) on Lake Wanipitei (Wahnapiatae) near Sudbury was a tragic example of the limitations of providing emergency services outside of southern / municipal Ontario.

On behalf of FOCA's members, the following letter was written in December 2014 to the local [MPP France Gelinias](#) (Nickel Belt), and copied to Minister of Health [Eric Hoskins](#), and to Ontario Fire Marshal & Chief, Emergency Management, [Ted Wieclawek](#):

*Dear MPP Gelinias, (and Messrs. Hoskins, and Wieclawek by cc),*

*Our organization represents thousands of rural and northern property owners, including many in your riding, and we are gravely concerned about their ability to reasonably access emergency services, should they need them. The fatally flawed dispatch of critical services to a June 2013 boating accident on Lake Wanapitei has heightened our concerns and prompted this request.*

*We would appreciate any information you can provide in relation to the follow up to this case, including information from the coroner's office, from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, EMO/OFM or others.*

*On behalf of our members, we would like some assurance that the health and well-being of northern and rural Ontario residents is a priority of the Provincial government, and that effective communications and coordination, along with adequate resources, are in place to respond to emergency situations faced by our citizens.*

*We would like to be able to accurately disseminate information to our members about how (or if) they can access emergency services should they need them, and also to accurately describe what their expectations should be regarding access to government-led emergency response in the future.*

*Respectfully,*

*Terry Rees, Executive Director  
Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA)*

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On February 24, 2015, FOCA received a response from Ms. Gelinas (but as yet nothing from the Ministry of Health, nor Emergency Management Ontario) :

*Mr. Rees,*

*Unfortunately the government has declined to hold an inquiry into the event on Lake Wanapitei and our researchers have found there are no generic expected response times for cottagers. Any response time will depend upon location and the specific circumstances of each individual cottage and the municipality in which they reside. If there is no cell or land line available their choices are limited, a satellite phone is probably their best bet. If there is cell service in the area of the cottage in question a GPS device that could give the user location coordinates could be recommended as they could share their coordinates when reporting the issue.*

*Sorry we don't have anything more substantial for you and your members Mr. Rees.*

*Sincerely,*

*DAMIEN WADDELL  
Legislative Assistant / Adjoint législatif  
FRANCE GÉLINAS*

*La députée de Nickel Belt MPP*