



Immediate Release

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MEDIA RELEASE

Is the latest Federal-Provincial Great Lakes Agreement Enough?

Groups say problems could overwhelm actions.

Toronto – The Federal and Ontario governments’ release of their 3-year Great Lakes work plan has raised concerns among leading Great Lakes based organizations. The most recent Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA), released yesterday, five months after the last Agreement expired, sets out actions and funding for the governments to carry out their shared obligations under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), Environmental Defence and Great Lakes United say the Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) will do too little, too slowly to clean up and protect the Great Lakes in the long term. Concerns focus on whether the work plans and commitments will keep pace with the challenges to the health and well being of the ecosystem.

- 1) Specific federal and provincial funding commitments to implement the COA programs between 2007- 2010 remain vague and difficult to evaluate.
- 2) The governments’ plan would extend the current Agreement, and adds several new requirements. However, what remains unanswered is when the governments plan to undertake a substantive review of the effectiveness of COA.
- 3) The lack of targets and deadlines to eliminate and reduce the most toxic and harmful substances, and the completion of clean up of Great Lakes hotspots, will limit this Agreement’s effectiveness.

“Many questions remain on the lack of goals and targets to prevent the release of most toxic chemicals to the Lakes. This leaves us wondering whether COA will actually result in the Great Lakes being cleaner and safer by 2010,” said Fe de Leon, researcher with the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

“The federal and provincial governments should immediately establish a long-term vision and plan for the Great Lakes that includes line by line budgets needed to carry out the plan. The US Great Lakes Collaborative has done a detailed plan with budgets for actions. They are currently seeking approvals from Congress to complete their clean-up obligations. Unfortunately, this Agreement

still does not detail the resources necessary for the jobs that need to be done in the Canadian portion of the Great Lakes. While there have been some increased commitments to the overall budget, the governments have not yet committed the billions of dollars needed to complete the Remedial Action Plans for cleaning up the historical pollution in the 15 designated Areas of Concern,” said John Jackson, the Clean Production Program Director of Great Lakes United.

The Great Lakes is the primary source of drinking water for over 8 million Canadians and is the largest fresh water body in the world. Over the past three decades, the Great Lakes have been subject to chronic threats from continuing high levels of toxic pollution from industrial activities, sewage discharges, eutrophication from increasing discharges of phosphorus, impacts from urbanization and development. New stresses are complicating the ability to restore the Great Lakes. Increasing numbers of alien invasive species, climate change impacts, and detection of new toxic substances and pharmaceutical products in water further threaten the quality of drinking water, ecosystems and human health. “We worry that incremental steps may not be big enough to keep pace with the complex interactions we are seeing in the ecosystem. It is increasingly difficult to know if individual and cumulative actions will ever be able to achieve the overall goals of restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.” said Sarah Miller, Researcher at CELA.

Some of the recent announcements by the federal and provincial governments on protecting water sources, air pollution, and managing toxic substances are mentioned in the new COA but without detail on how these activities will be implemented. As well, several important new provisions on drinking water source protection and tracking climate change impacts have been added. The federal government is currently reviewing suggested improvements to the *Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* but it is unclear if these new provisions will be mirrored in these improvements.

“Canada’s laws are still not up to the task of protecting the Great Lakes,” said Aaron Freeman, Policy Director at Environmental Defence. “Cities are still dumping raw sewage into the Lakes, and industrial and agricultural pollution threats are not being addressed.”

Substantial submissions have been submitted by the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Environmental Defence and Great Lakes United on COA. Visit: www.cela.ca to download submissions.

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