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A PROPOSAL FOR ADDRESSING ALGAL BLOOMS AND FUNDING GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

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Action on Algal Blooms

The 2015 western Lake Erie algal bloom was the ‘most severe recorded this century’ according to a National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report. Reducing harmful algal blooms on Lake Erie will require a combination of improved data and monitoring, the implementation of innovative practices on the ground, and stronger community engagement— all requiring additional financial resources.

The Great Lakes Protection Act (2015) sets out a policy framework to restore the health of the Great Lakes. However, the Great Lakes were not mentioned in the 2016 budget. A new source of funding could be put toward programs that help farmers maintain and enhance agricultural lands, and protect water. Monies could also be used for developing sub-watershed nutrient profiles and ameliorating point-source pollution sources where appropriate. Algae is a problem, but it also presents an opportunity to take action using a suite of policy tools, including education and incentives that reward good stewardship of the land and water.

Desired Outcome

Ontario achieves nutrient reduction targets in the Great Lakes in a way that supports rural communities and ensures that key stakeholders are actively involved and rewarded for helping to protect water.

Investing in Great Lakes Protection

The undersigned representatives of Ontario's environmental and agricultural communities recommend that province ensure adequate funding is dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin, including (but not limited to) investing in:

- Implementation of *The Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015*
- Dedicated funding to help farmers protect the Great Lakes ecosystem

The ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin is crucially important to Ontario's (and Canada's) economic health. The Basin is home to 90 per cent of Ontarians and supports 40 per cent of Canada's economic activity. The Great Lakes are the drinking water source for 8.5 million Canadians, and support 25 per cent of Canada's agricultural capacity. Every year, the region makes significant contributions to trade (\$180 billion to Canada-U.S. trade), recreational activities (\$1.5 million recreational boaters and a \$350 million recreational fishing industry), and commercial fishing (\$100 million commercial fishing industry).

Given that the health of Lakes Huron, Erie and Ontario is declining due to cumulative stressors – including toxics pollution, intense urban growth, nutrient loss from agricultural activities, hardening of shorelines, and arrival of invasive species (such as zebra mussels) – it is imperative to ensure resources are allocated to reverse this decline, particularly with a changing climate that is exacerbating cumulative impacts.

Information from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change indicates that a 2:1 economic return can result from investing in Great Lakes restoration. We the undersigned believe that Ontario must ensure that adequate investment is made in protection and restoration going forward.

Proposal for Augmenting Available Funding

We believe that a charge on single-use plastic beverage containers, especially plastic water bottles, would create a win-win for water and waste policy. With the province implementing the new *Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario* and a need for greater investment in water quality (especially in terms of meeting nutrient reduction commitments), the timing and need for such a measure could not be better.

Plastic pollution has reached every corner of the globe including the Great Lakes. In fact, 80 per cent of the litter in the Great Lakes region is plastic. The solution, is putting a price on plastic pollution.

The majority of Canadian jurisdictions have a deposit-refund program for non-alcoholic beverages. Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut are the exception. As a result, the collection rate for PET plastic beverage containers in Ontario is very low (47 per cent for PET in 2012¹) relative to Canadian

¹ http://www.wdo.ca/files/9713/7935/8851/CBCRA_Beverage_Container_Draft_ISP.pdf

jurisdictions with deposit-refund programs (between 72 and 95 per cent in 2012). What is not recovered ends up in landfills or as litter, threatening our ecosystems and water quality.

In addition to improving recovery rates, a well-designed deposit return program can also generate much needed resources to protect our freshwater. Other provinces, New Brunswick for example, use revenues from the plastic bottle deposit return program to raise funds for environmental initiatives. In Ontario, this added revenue could be dedicated to addressing water quality threats in Ontario.

We have identified two options for creating a sustainable source of funding:

1. Establish a deposit return program for all single-use beverage containers and the province retains the unredeemed deposits in a special purpose account.
2. Establish a deposit return program for all single-use beverage containers, where part of the deposit is returned and the remainder is held back as a container handling fee in a special purpose account.

We estimate that either of these options could generate on the order of \$100 million annually which could be put into a special purpose account dedicated to protecting freshwater.

If you would like more information on any of the above, please contact Ashley Wallis, Water Program Manager, Environmental Defence at awallis@environmentaldefence.ca.

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