



Canadian Association of  
**Physicians**  
for the  
**Environment**

**Submission to:** The Standing Committee on General Government on Bill 66 –  
The Proposed Great Lakes Protection Act

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The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (**CAPE**) is a non-profit organization with approximately 6000 members across the country. CAPE was established 22 years ago by physicians who understood the many ways in which the environment can shape the health of people. Our organization is directed by an 11-person Board composed primarily of medical doctors. I am here today to express CAPE's support for Bill 66 – the Proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

Everyone in this room understands the importance of the Great Lakes to the residents of Ontario. They are the source of drinking water for 10 million Ontario residents. They are a source of food for our tables. We use their waters for 25% of Canada's agricultural production. We use their water for washing our dishes, bathing, and watering our gardens. We use the Great Lakes for recreation; for cottages and swimming, for fishing and boating. We use their water to support 75% of Canada's manufacturing activity, to generate electricity, and as a receptacle for our wastewater. The Great Lakes are central to our health, economy and way of life in Ontario.

Given the importance of the Great Lakes and the many diverse ways in which they are used, it is essential that their use is carefully managed, monitored and controlled. As an organization run by health professionals, we look at environmental issues through the lens of health. When we look at this proposed Act, we think of the different ways in which watershed management is important to the health of Ontario residents. We think about how dependent we are upon a reliable supply of clean and safe water. We think about the ways in which human health can be adversely impacted by the chemical and biological agents that can enter our water systems. For example:

1. As Walkerton reminded us, water supplies can be contaminated with deadly consequences by livestock manure under the wrong circumstances. In Walkerton, it was the combination of a poorly managed water system, livestock manure surrounding the well head, and an exceptionally heavy downpour that created a tragic outcome (O'Connor, 2002).
2. We know that blue-green algae blooms, that can develop when water systems are overwhelmed by nutrients such as phosphorous, are toxic to humans (OMOE, 2015). We know that people can be exposed to the toxins associated with these microscopic organisms by drinking the water or by bathing or swimming in the water (Health Canada, 2015).

3. We know that there are many households and communities in Ontario that are dependent upon well water for their drinking water. It is not uncommon to hear about households that must “truck in their water supplies” because of artesian wells that have been drawn dry by golf courses, quarries or other heavy users of water.
4. We continue to be concerned about the toxic substances that can enter the watershed as emissions from industrial processes (e.g. chromium), commercial operations (e.g. dry-cleaning solvents, gasoline, mercury), wastewater (e.g. pharmaceuticals, microbeads), and residential uses of consumer products (e.g. the flame retardant, polybrominated diphenyl ether [PBDE])(OMOE, 2013). Some of these substances present harm to people when ingested as drinking water. Others present a concern to human health by disrupting the ecosystems upon which we are dependent (e.g. “neonic” pesticides)(TFSP, 2014). And others still, present harm to humans by accumulating in the food chain, where they can be consumed by people (e.g. mercury)(Environment Canada/Health Canada, 2010).

With all of these water-related health concerns in mind, we would like to express our support for the Proposed Great Lakes Water Protection Act, which we understand, provides legal tools that can be used to monitor, manage and control watershed issues that may not be adequately addressed with existing legislation. We would also like to endorse the September 2015 Submission prepared by the Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance.

#### References:

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