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For immediate release

2000 Ontario Budget Cuts Environment Funding Again

MOE has 39% less budget than in 94/95

Analysis from the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP)

Ontario's 2000-2001 budget, presented yesterday, cuts the operating budget of the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) by \$16 million, leaving the Ministry's budget for controlling pollution and enforcing environmental laws, with \$100 million or 39% less than in 1994/95.

The MOE has already effectively admitted that it does not have the resources necessary to enforce Ontario's environmental laws. The February 1999 'Delivery Strategy.' directed MOE to not enforce dozens of environmental laws and regulations.

It is difficult to imagine how the MOE will deal with the serious environmental problems facing Ontario, such as smog and rapid growing imports of hazardous wastes (56,000 tonnes imported in 1993 increased to 288,000 tonnes in 1998), with even less resources than before.

The government has expanded subsidies for environmentally destructive development. The Budget includes major new subsidies to the mining industry, including a 50% cut in the Ontario Mining Tax, an extension of the mining tax exemption for new mines, and new subsidies for mineral exploration. These initiatives have been announced despite estimates that the Ontario taxpayer will be paying anywhere from \$300 million to \$3 billion, for the remediation of abandoned mines in the province.

The budget also re-affirms \$1 billion in commitments to highway expansion, while providing no provincial funding for public transit. This is despite the clear evidence that new highway construction will reduce air quality in the province. The Ontario medical association has estimated that 1,800 Ontarians die prematurely due to poor air quality each year.

Other jurisdictions are reforming tax systems to support and encourage environmentally sustainable development and increase the competitiveness of their economies. They have been removing of subsidies for environmentally unsustainable activities like mining and highway construction, and shifting the tax burden from individual income to environmentally damaging activities. Ontario has decided to go in the opposite direction. This will ultimately be as costly to Ontarians' pocketbooks, as it will to their health and environment.

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The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.