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MEDIA RELEASE

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ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS CHALLENGE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT'S *OPEN FOR BUSINESS ACT*

Toronto - Today, three of Ontario's leading environmental organizations stated their opposition to the Ontario government's proposed *Open for Business Act*. Under the proposed Act, Ontarians would lose fundamental legal rights established under the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, one of Ontario's most important laws. The *Open for Business Act* would remove the opportunity for public notice and comment for certain industrial activities that will be subject to a new environmental approvals process. Citizens would also lose the right to seek leave to appeal approval of these activities to the Environmental Review Tribunal.

"The proposed legislation lays the foundation for the rollback of public participation rights in Ontario," said Ramani Nadarajah, counsel with the Canadian Environmental Law Association. "The government's action would undermine important legal rights which Ontario citizens have had since the enactment of the *Environmental Bill of Rights* in 1994."

Maureen Carter-Whitney, research director, with the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy stated, "The *Open for Business Act* closes the door for citizen input into a significant number of the government's environmental decision-making processes and will prevent potential environmental problems from being identified and corrected."

"The government's proposed Act weakens accountability by decision-makers," said Elaine MacDonald, senior scientist at Ecojustice. "The government will no longer be required by law to take the public's views and opinions into account before the affected environmental decisions are finalized or implemented."

The environmental groups have called upon the government to amend the proposed Act so as to leave intact the public notice and comment, and third party appeal rights under the *Environmental Bill of Rights*.

A brief providing a detailed analysis of the government's new proposal on environmental approvals can be found at <http://www.cela.ca/sites/cela.ca/files/720.ModernizingApprovalsProcess.pdf>

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