

THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM G. NEWMAN
MINISTER
ONTARIO MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

STATEMENT

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT, 1975

July 3, 1975

MR. CHAIRMAN:

This is a pioneering legislation. It has been carefully drafted. It recognizes the need to deal with environmental concerns before the fact rather than when the damage has been done. It makes broad provisions for public participation and information. It provides for objective assessment of a situation by means of an independent Board. This Board will make decisions. However, in all matters, the Bill reserves the final responsibility for the responsible Minister and Cabinet. And this is the way it should be. I would like to briefly repeat and expand on my comments in the Legislature last night.

We intend to apply common sense, flexibility and caution in the implementation of this Bill when proclaimed.

The effective application of this Bill, to activities in this Province, will require trained personnel in numbers not now available to my Ministry, to its agencies, to municipalities and to the private sector. To apply this Bill, and its inception to all undertakings, would result in administrative chaos which could defeat the purposes of the Bill.

We will proceed with caution and restraint.

Initially all undertakings of the Ontario Government, its agencies and municipalities, will come under the Act.

However, to give our municipalities a further opportunity to examine the total ramifications of this Bill and to present any questions, which they may wish to discuss with my Ministry, we are exempting the municipalities from the Bill at the outset. But they will be brought under the provisions at a later date. Undertakings by the private sector, similarly, will be brought under the Bill at a time depending upon our administrative capability and experience. However, within the limitations just mentioned, it is my hope and intention that all projects of a major environmental significance will come under the scrutiny of the authority of this legislation within 18 months. I really think this is the best that could be hoped for.

To repeat, to apply this Bill at its inception, to all undertakings would result in administrative chaos which could defeat the purposes of the Bill. However, having said that, I hope that the mere passage of this legislation will instill an environmental consciousness in the minds in all project proponents. We want environmental assessment and protection to be automatically recognized by everyone, as one of the major principal and initial considerations when planning a project. This is necessary. There is no other way in this rapidly industrializing province. I am looking forward to the discussion of this Bill.