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**Conservation
Authorities Act Review**

Stage II Engagement Sessions Summary Report

Prepared by Lura Consulting and Planning Solutions Inc. for:
The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
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This report was prepared by Lura Consulting and Planning Solutions Inc., the independent facilitators and consultation specialists for the Conservation Authorities Act Review Stage II engagement sessions conducted in June 2016. If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please contact:

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MNRF Conservation Authorities Act Review Stage II
Engagement Sessions Summary Report

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Appendix A – Workshop Summary Reports

1. Introduction

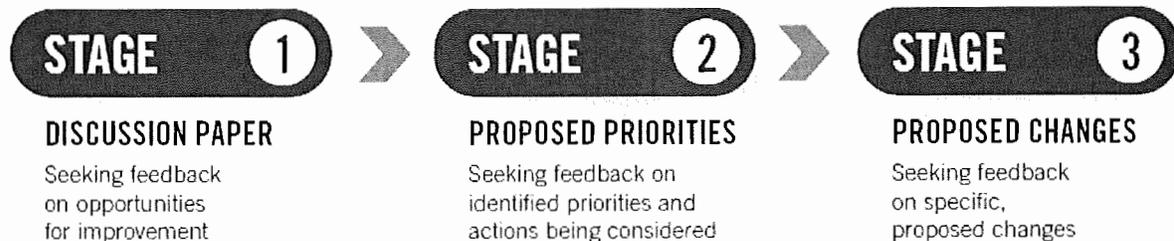
Background

The *Conservation Authorities Act*, enacted in 1946, allows municipalities in a common watershed to establish a conservation authority in conjunction with the province to deliver a local resource management program at the watershed scale for both provincial and municipal interests.

In November 2014, the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) was given a mandate to engage with ministries, municipalities, Indigenous Peoples and stakeholders to initiate a review of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The review was launched the following summer, with the objective to identify opportunities to improve the legislative, regulatory and policy framework that currently governs the creation, operation and activities of conservation authorities, including addressing roles and responsibilities, governance and funding of conservation authorities in resource management and environmental protection.

Overall Conservation Authorities Act Review Process

THE CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT REVIEW PROCESS



There are several stages in the *Conservation Authorities (CA) Act* Review process, with opportunities for public input at each stage. The first stage began in July 2015 and sought feedback on opportunities to improve the *CA Act*. A discussion paper was posted on the Environmental Registry (EBR Registry Number 012-4509) for a 91-day public review and comment period. Stage 2 began in May 2016 and focused on seeking feedback on proposed priorities identified from feedback during the first stage, as well as the development of specific actions for implementation over the short, medium and long term. A consultation document outlining proposed priorities for updating the Act was posted on the Environmental Registry (EBR Registry Number 012-7583) for a 120 day public review and comment period. During the third stage specific changes to the *CA Act* will be proposed and further consulted on.

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Overview of Stage I

Stage I consultations included over 20 stakeholder and Indigenous engagement sessions in addition to targeted meetings across the province to obtain feedback on three areas:

- **Governance:** The processes, structures, and accountability frameworks within the Act which direct conservation authority decision-making and operations;
- **Funding mechanisms:** The mechanisms put in place by the Act to fund conservation authorities; and
- **Roles and responsibilities:** The roles and associated responsibilities that the Act enables conservation authorities to undertake.

The Stage I review process resulted in extensive feedback. Over 270 submissions were provided to the Ministry during the public commenting period from individuals and groups representing 10 different sectors. Analysis of this feedback helped to identify a number of priority areas for improvement.

Objectives for Stage II

In response to feedback obtained through the initial stage of the Ministry's review, the government established five priorities for updating the Act's legislative, regulatory and policy framework:

1. Strengthening oversight and accountability in decision-making.
2. Increasing clarity and consistency in roles and responsibilities, processes and requirements.
3. Improving collaboration and engagement among all parties involved in resource management.
4. Modernizing funding mechanisms to support conservation authority operations.
5. Enhancing flexibility for the province to update the *Conservation Authorities Act* framework in the future.

These priority areas as well as a series of potential actions were outlined in the discussion paper – *Conserving Our Future: Proposed Priorities for Renewal*. In May and June 2016, MNRF led a second round of public and stakeholder consultations through 5 regional multi-stakeholder engagement sessions. The sessions provided an opportunity for participants to learn about and provide input to the five priority areas. Lura Consulting and Planning Solutions Inc. were retained to facilitate the engagement sessions and report on the feedback provided by participants.

This report provides a summary of the consultation program and key consultation activities undertaken as part of the regional multi-stakeholder engagement sessions, as well as the feedback received through those sessions. It does not include feedback submitted to the Environmental Registry, or input from Indigenous engagement sessions which took place and will be reported on separately.

Feedback obtained through Stage II consultations will be used by MNRF staff to develop specific changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and associated policy and regulatory framework. Any specific

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proposed changes will be subject to further public consultation as appropriate, for example through subsequent Environmental Registry postings.

2. Methodology for Stage II Multi-Stakeholder Consultation Program

Throughout June 2016, MNRF hosted full-day workshops in five locations across Ontario as part of the Stage II consultation program. The dates, locations and number of participants at each workshop are listed in the table below. The purpose of the workshops was to provide an overview of and receive feedback on the five priority areas for improving the *CA Act*. The workshops consisted of an overview plenary presentation with time for questions of clarification, followed by facilitated discussion. The facilitated discussions were designed to encourage dialogue and obtain feedback on the five priority areas for improving the *CA Act*. A discussion guide was provided to participants during the workshops as well as form to rank the proposed actions.

Date	Location	Number of Participants
June 3, 2016	Ottawa	23
June 7, 2016	Thunder Bay	7
June 9, 2016	London	57
June 13, 2016	Newmarket	59
June 15, 2016	Sudbury	12
Total		158

A summary of the comments and suggestions provided by participants during the workshops is presented in the next section.

3. Summary of Participant Feedback

This section presents the overarching key themes that emerged from the feedback obtained at the regional sessions, and is followed by a summary of participant feedback organized according to the five priority areas: (1) Strengthening Oversight and Accountability, (2) Increasing Clarity and Consistency, (3) Improving Collaboration and Engagement, (4) Modernizing Funding Mechanisms, and (5) Enhancing Flexibility for the Province. Each section contains highlights and common themes that emerged throughout the sessions. Sector-specific perspectives are also noted. Individual workshop summary reports are provided in Appendix A.

Overarching Key Themes

The following points highlight the recurring comments, concerns and/or advice which emerged from the five sessions.

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- Include integrated watershed management (IWM) in the Act as the overarching approach to conservation.
- Recognize that each CA is inherently unique. Local conditions and circumstances influence programs and services (particularly in Northern and rural communities); legislative changes must recognize the need for continued local autonomy (i.e., flexibility).
- Reinstate the provincial/municipal partnership as the collaborative model that was envisioned for CAs.
- Establish a multi-ministerial body to promote dialogue and collaborative decision-making regarding CA roles and responsibilities.
- Increase and diversify provincial funding to CAs to support the implementation of conservation programs and services.
- Ensure that any new or additional programs and services are delegated with adequate resources (particularly funding).
- Update provincial policies and technical guidelines to ensure they reflect the current suite of issues facing CAs.
- Ensure the interests of all stakeholders (e.g., OFAH members, agricultural sector, landowners, Indigenous Peoples) are considered during decision-making processes.
- Establish a provincial “one-window” to streamline planning processes and approvals, with clear expectations for provincial, municipal and CA roles and responsibilities.
- Concerns, as expressed by CAs, that the potential actions do not reflect the fundamental issues affecting CAs (e.g., reinstating the pre-1995 relationship between the province and CAs, provincial support in terms of funding, etc.).
- Concerns, as expressed by CAs, that the review focuses on CA Act processes and procedures instead of protecting and enhancing the natural environment through the CA Act.

Priority #1: Strengthening Oversight and Accountability

A. Updating the Act to reflect modern legislative structures and accountabilities

Participants consistently expressed support for including a purpose statement in the CA Act that includes integrated watershed management (IWM) as the overarching approach to conservation. There was also support from participants at the Newmarket session for including a vision, mission, and values for CAs that can be updated on a regular basis.

There was consistent feedback that the province needs to ensure there is flexibility within the legislation as priorities vary across different watersheds and will change over time (e.g., climate change considerations). Local autonomy is very important to CAs.

Feedback from participants at the Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and London sessions indicated support for defining the roles and responsibilities of various parties involved in providing oversight. It was noted that there is a misunderstanding among the public, municipalities, and other ministries about what CA responsibilities entail.

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It was suggested by participants at the London session that the CA Act be modernized so that it is easier to update in the future (i.e., include certain aspects as regulation and policy rather than legislation so they can be updated more frequently). There was also support from participants at the Thunder Bay and Newmarket sessions to update provincial policies and technical guidelines to ensure they reflect the current suite of issues facing CAs.

Feedback from participants at the Ottawa, Thunder Bay, London, and Newmarket sessions suggested that updates to the CA Act should include an improved appeal process for planning and permitting.

B. Adopting and/or aligning with governance best management practices

Feedback from the Newmarket session indicated that the existing governance model is working well; it was also noted that many CAs comply with codes of conduct and/or currently provide board member orientation. On the other hand, participants from the Ottawa, Thunder Bay and London sessions indicated a need for more training and guidance to improve consistency in governance. It was also noted that there is a need to clarify how conflicts of interest among board members should be addressed.

It was suggested that the MNRF should provide some minimum guidance for governance best management practices which CAs can then adapt at the local level. Some participants (London) suggested that operational audits of CAs should be reinstated.

Feedback from participants at the Ottawa, Thunder Bay and London sessions suggested following the governance model used by Public Health Units as an example of best practices, particularly with respect to determining an avenue for appeals regarding codes of conduct or conflict of interest.

C. Enhancing provincial oversight

Participants from all the sessions raised the concern that if the province is going to delegate additional CA programs and services, or increase direction and oversight of programs, additional funding should be provided to CAs. Participants also cautioned that local flexibility for CAs should not be reduced through increased provincial oversight.

Feedback from the Newmarket session suggested establishing a third-party process or mechanism to address public concerns and ensure CAs are accountable to their legislated roles and responsibilities (e.g., Ontario Municipal Board, appeal mechanism, penalties); while there is currently a process for CA permit applicants to appeal permit decisions to the Mining and Lands Commissioner, there are no formal mechanisms to appeal other matters (e.g., disclosure of information).

Feedback from the Ottawa session suggested establishing meaningful key performance indicators to measure the impact of CA programs and services for larger, strategic and regional initiatives. Examples of key performance indicators suggested by participants focused on ecological services provided

through CA, regional and provincial initiatives, and climate change and carbon sequestration results associated with CA programs and initiatives. Participants from the Thunder Bay and Sudbury sessions highlighted the need to achieve a balance of provincial and municipal oversight to allow local flexibility based on watershed needs.

D. Enhancing municipal oversight

Participants from the Ottawa and Thunder Bay sessions expressed support to enhance municipal oversight, but indicated there is a need to clearly articulate what the enhancement entails. Participants from the Ottawa and Sudbury sessions noted that there is already accountability and oversight at the municipal level through the CA board.

Feedback from the Sudbury session indicated concern that enhancing municipal oversight may impact the ability of CAs to make critical decisions objectively (e.g., review permits, perform advisory function). It was suggested that the roles and responsibilities of municipalities in relation to CAs should be clarified, including fiduciary duties.

There was a suggestion from participants at the Newmarket session that mandatory review periods for municipality/CA Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and Service Level Agreements be considered (e.g., every five years); this would ensure that MOUs and service agreements remain current.

E. Developing or updating criteria for establishing, enlarging, amalgamating or dissolving a CA

Participants expressed support for developing criteria for establishing, enlarging, amalgamating or dissolving a CA. It was noted by participants from the Thunder Bay session that regional differences should be reflected in the criteria (e.g., if the CA were to be enlarged in Northern Ontario there is no mechanism to levy unorganized townships).

Participants from the London session suggested implementing a process to achieve minor CA boundary adjustments as some municipalities are located in two or more CAs.

Several participants raised concerns about municipalities within a watershed having the opportunity to opt out of a CA as there needs to be holistic management of natural resources on a watershed scale.

Priority #2: Increasing Clarity and Consistency

A. Clearly delineating between mandatory and optional programs and services

Participants generally expressed support for this potential action, specifically as a means to enhance the clarity and consistency of CA regulatory roles and responsibilities. Participant feedback from the Newmarket session cautioned that there are trade-offs to delineating between mandatory and optional programs and services, including the concern that doing so will reduce CA flexibility and autonomy.

Feedback from the Ottawa session also highlighted the need to consider different watershed needs across the province and the ability of different CAs to deliver mandated programs and services (i.e., different capabilities in terms of resources). There was some feedback from the London session which suggested that programs and services pertaining to flood and hazard management, in particular, should be mandatory, however IWM was iterated as the preferred approach to conservation at all the sessions (and as a means to provide flexibility).

It was also repeatedly noted that appropriate tools (e.g., sustainable funding from the province, provincial guidance/collaboration) are needed to ensure the delivery of CA programs and services.

B. Establishing a Provincial Policy Directive

Participant feedback consistently voiced support to establish a Provincial Policy Directive. The benefits associated with this potential action include:

- Clarifying CA roles and responsibilities;
- Developing an integrated policy framework (that aligns with other provincial legislation and identifies the hierarchy between them); and
- Establishing a policy framework that has a purpose and is tied to outcomes.

Participants from the Ottawa session iterated the concern that specifying CA roles and responsibilities will limit CA flexibility and autonomy, as the Act is currently written to allow CAs to adapt to the needs of their watershed. Feedback from the Newmarket and London sessions echoed the need to retain flexibility, but noted that enough direction should be provided to facilitate compliance. IWM was suggested by CAs as the basis of the policy directive as it recognizes the multiples roles and responsibilities CAs undertake.

C. Providing clarity and consistency in CA's regulatory roles and responsibilities

Participant feedback indicated broad support for this potential action and its intended outcomes. It was noted that consolidating and codifying regulatory requirements will help reduce the potential for misinterpretation, and associated legal disputes. Several key terms were also identified that are used inconsistently and need to be clarified: conservation land, wetland, watercourse, natural heritage, natural resources and integrated watershed management.

It was suggested at the Sudbury session that clarifying key terms can be addressed through the Act or supporting regulations, while most of the objectives of this potential action could be implemented through responsive policies or enabling provisions. Feedback from participants in Ottawa suggested the use of legislative mechanisms, such as the statute's preamble, to clarify CA roles and responsibilities.

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Concerns were raised at the Newmarket session, particularly by landowners, regarding the inconsistent delivery of CA programs and services. It was noted by CA staff that this is a separate issue from clarifying CA roles and responsibilities, and is primarily due to resource constraints facing CAs (e.g., qualified staff, mapping tools, funding, etc.); the need for more funding, as well as coordinating and sharing resources between provincial, municipal and CA partners were suggested to help address this issue. A few participants also advised that promoting consistency in the delivery of CA programs and services is well defined in the Conservation Authority Liaison Committee (CALC) Report.

Participant feedback also highlighted the following considerations with regard to this potential action:

- Recognize the multiple roles and responsibilities CAs currently undertake in the Act (e.g., hazard management, watershed management, commenting on environmental assessments, service provider, regulator, and land owner).
- Update policy and procedure documents to clarify areas of jurisdiction, roles and responsibilities.
- Note that communication and public education are important “soft tools” that can help improve clarity, consistency and transparency (in terms of CA roles and responsibilities).

The need to ensure a balance between clarifying CA roles and responsibilities while retaining flexibility to respond to individual watershed needs, as well as using IWM as an overarching framework for CAs was also iterated in the feedback to this potential action.

D. Enhancing compliance and enforcement of regulatory requirements

Support for this potential action varied among participants. Feedback from the Ottawa, Newmarket, and London consultations expressed support to update regulatory compliance tools and mechanisms (e.g., stop work orders, increasing fines, etc.), while feedback from Thunder Bay participants expressed concerns about the cost of implementing this action, and suggested that it should be less of a priority. There was no feedback specific to this potential action from the Sudbury session.

Participant feedback from the Ottawa, Newmarket, London and Thunder Bay consultations all indicated that current regulatory compliance tools are insufficient, and that legal proceedings are costly and time consuming, negatively impacting limited CA resources. More provincial support for legal proceedings (e.g., funding, guidance, creating a mechanism to recover costs from appeals and fines) was suggested.

Feedback from landowners at the Newmarket session identified the need for a process to address conflicts of interests to ensure CAs (and their boards) are accountable and transparent. Feedback from both the Newmarket and London sessions suggested that education and collaboration should be promoted to improve CA’s relationships with landowners regarding the enforcement of regulations.

E. Streamlining planning and permitting requirements and processes

Feedback obtained from all the regional sessions consistently expressed support for this potential action. It was noted that it is important to make planning and permitting processes more user-friendly as this will result in more buy-in and positive relationships between CAs and their watershed communities.

Several suggestions to streamline planning and permitting requirements and processes were raised by participants, including but not limited to: pre-consultation meetings and/or checklists; establishing universal review timelines; updating guidance documents; using different classes of approvals (e.g., Class Environmental Assessment (EA) approach), establishing a “one-window” permit approval approach, updating administrative processes and procedures; and increasing collaboration and partnerships between the province, municipalities and CAs, with input from stakeholders and the public.

Priority #3: Improving Collaboration and Engagement

A. Establishing a provincial “one-window”

Participants generally expressed support for the establishment of a provincial “one-window” to act as a single point of contact for CAs at the Ministry level. This approach would be beneficial to enhance communication and exchange information between the province and CAs, and provide support/advice to CAs. It was noted by participants at the Thunder Bay session that this approach could also provide efficiencies for CAs with respect to gaining access to funding opportunities.

Participants at the Newmarket session suggested that MOUs should be required to ensure the “one-window” approach is clear to all parties involved and that a provincial “one-window” should also address challenges facing the development community regarding permitting issues.

B. Establishing a business relationship with Conservation Ontario

Regarding the role of Conservation Ontario (CO) and its relationship with CAs, participants from the Ottawa and London sessions suggested that MNRF should consider the model used by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) as a best practice.

There was concern expressed by CAs at most of the sessions that CO should not take on a governing or oversight role. It was noted that CO’s current role is working well. With dedicated provincial funding, CO could provide strategic guidance and coordinate resources (e.g., training, best practices, templates) more consistently. There was also support for CO’s ongoing role in public education, communication and advocacy for CAs.

C. Enhancing Indigenous Peoples' participation

Participants consistently noted that enhancing Indigenous Peoples' participation in CA processes is important; however resources and guidance are needed as there are many challenges in conducting meaningful engagement. CAs would like to see the province provide templates and best practices for engaging with Indigenous Peoples.

It was also noted by participants at the London session that Indigenous Peoples' participation should be at a watershed and strategic planning level rather a project by project level; however there is a need for more support in achieving this. In some areas, First Nations advisory committees are working well.

It was suggested that the Federal government should also provide funding to CAs for facilitating Indigenous Peoples' participation.

D. Enhancing public and stakeholder participation

There was general support for enhancing public and stakeholder participation in CA processes to ensure a broad range of interests are considered (e.g. landowners, farmers) and increase transparency. From the perspective of some landowners, stakeholder engagement is not occurring consistently across CAs. A guidance document for CAs could help improve consistency.

It was noted that some CAs have more capacity and experience than others in engaging the public and stakeholders. Additional staff and financial resources are needed by smaller CAs to manage stakeholder engagement.

Feedback from the Ottawa, London and Sudbury sessions noted that advisory or ad hoc committees have worked well to enhance stakeholder participation.

Some participants feel that there is a lack of understanding amongst community members regarding the mandate and role of CAs. Enhancing education and awareness of the various roles of CAs, municipalities and the province would be beneficial. Similarly, it is important to employ a culture of collaboration with landowners. There needs to be more transparency, two-way communication and sharing of information between CAs and landowners.

E. Supporting CAs in sharing and coordinating resources

There was support for encouraging CAs to share data, science and information as well as achieve administrative efficiencies; however this should not be prescribed in the CA Act. It was noted that sharing and coordinating resources and best practices between CAs is already happening at the local level.

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Concerns were expressed that it may be challenging to share information and resources in an equitable manner. The province should provide resources to CAs. Questions were raised regarding who would be financially responsible for coordinating resources.

Priority #4: Modernizing Funding Mechanisms

There was consensus across the regional sessions that long-term sustainable funding must be prioritized for CAs to be able to deliver programs and services effectively. A multi-ministry approach to funding was emphasized because CAs deliver locally on priorities for many ministries (e.g., MOECC).

A. Enhancing clarity, consistency and accountability around municipal levies

Participant feedback consistently indicated that there is a need to simplify and clarify the funding formula for municipal levies and clarify the intent of the levy.

There was concern raised by participants at the Ottawa, Thunder Bay, London and Newmarket sessions that smaller municipalities do not have the capacity (e.g., tax base) to support CAs. It was suggested that a funding formula should be considered to equalize funding between CAs (based on population, programming, species at risk, watershed characteristics, etc.) paid by the province.

Participants at the Newmarket and Sudbury sessions expressed concerns that the present funding model creates a conflict of interest between CAs and municipalities and limits CA autonomy from municipalities.

There was a suggestion from participants at the Newmarket and London sessions for municipal levies for CA programs and services to be included as a separate line item on municipal tax bills (e.g., comparable to water rates) to increase public awareness.

B. Promoting clarity, consistency and accountability around fees and generated revenue

Participants noted that clarity around fees and how they can be used by a CA would be beneficial. It was suggested that MNR should provide clear guidance on acceptable revenue streams. Similarly, there was support from participants at the Ottawa session for establishing a framework to calculate fees to improve transparency as it is undertaken differently by all CAs.

Participants suggested that other mechanisms to generate revenue be included in the CA Act (e.g., development charges). There was support from participants at the Newmarket session for establishing a mechanism for CAs to capture funds from compliance and enforcement activities (e.g., penalties, legal processes). It was also suggested that the opportunity for CAs to release conservation land with marginal natural heritage benefits for other uses be considered; the resources spent to maintain these lands could be re-deployed elsewhere. Participants from the Thunder Bay session were also supportive

of innovative opportunities for municipal funding arrangements (e.g., new tax classification for CA owned hazard-related lands, tax rates reflective of the land use and benefit provided).

Participants at the Ottawa and London sessions noted that some CAs need support to justify user fees as the public does not understand how they are established. Participants at the Newmarket session also suggested encouraging regular communication and collaboration on fees (e.g., liaison committee, bi-annual meetings with stakeholders).

Participants from the Newmarket and Thunder Bay session stated that there is also a need to establish a mechanism to mediate disputes regarding fees (e.g., appeal to a third-party such as the OMB).

C. Improving fiscal oversight and transparency

Many participants expressed that municipal oversight and transparency is already strong.

Participants from the Ottawa and Sudbury sessions expressed the need to ensure board members understand the fiduciary responsibility of their role to the CA and watershed (e.g., provide training).

Feedback from the Ottawa, London, and Sudbury sessions indicated that there is a desire for standardized and consistent budgeting practices; however, participants from the Newmarket session expressed that standardizing budget templates may add complexity and an administrative burden. It was noted that some municipalities currently ask for compliance with their own budget formats.

D. Improving clarity in the use of provincial funding processes

Participants at all the session continually indicated that more provincial funding and resourcing is needed and that this should be a prioritized action. Diversifying the funding mechanisms available to CAs was broadly supported (e.g., development charges, utility fees, external funding).

There was concern raised by participants at the Newmarket session about the requirement to reapply for certain grants annually as it is an administrative burden for many CAs. Feedback from the Thunder Bay and London sessions indicated that CAs should be able to apply directly for Trillium funding to streamline the process.

Participants at the London session noted that the timing of the release of transfer payments creates challenges for CAs (i.e. fiscal years are not aligned). A multi-year funding model would create greater efficiencies in administering programs. It was also noted that the transfer payment should be indexed to the rate of inflation. Municipalities are currently making up the difference for inflation increases.

Priority #5: Enhancing Flexibility for the Province

A. Giving the Minister the authority to use the Act to develop additional natural resource conservation and management programs and services in the future

Participant feedback expressed general support regarding this potential action if the purpose is to enable the Minister to be more responsive to contemporary issues (e.g., climate change), and recognize the multiple roles and responsibilities CAs currently undertake. It was suggested by participants at the Newmarket session that more information about this potential action is needed to clarify its intent (and what types of programs and services could be delegated), as it could be misinterpreted as a movement toward a more “command and control” approach by the province.

There was some concern raised that specifying too many details in the Act will reduce flexibility for CAs and municipalities, and that other mechanisms or tools should be considered to delegate responsibilities (e.g., MOUs, Ministerial Mandates, Provincial Policy Statement, regulations).

Feedback from most of the regional sessions also stressed that if new or additional programs and services are delegated, they should be accompanied by appropriate tools and resources, particularly funding, to ensure they are implemented.

B. Giving the Minister the authority to formally delegate the delivery of current and additional natural resource conservation and management programs and services to conservation authorities in the future

Participant feedback regarding this potential action was similar to that received for the preceding action; as such, participants from the Sudbury session suggested combining the first two potential actions under this priority area.

Feedback iterated the need to clarify the intent of the potential action and provide examples of what may be delegated to provide CAs with more certainty. Comments also emphasized that the province should provide appropriate tools and resources, especially funding, with any new delegated programs and services.

Participant feedback from the Newmarket session also suggested establishing a multi-ministerial body to delegate additional programs and services through a collaborative decision-making process, while feedback from the London session indicated that there is a general feeling that this kind of delegation already can and does take place.

C. Giving the Minister the authority to formally delegate the delivery of current and additional natural resource conservation and management programs and services to other public bodies, not-for-profit organizations, municipalities and other Ministries

Participant feedback regarding this potential action varied. On one hand, feedback from the Newmarket and London sessions expressed support for this potential action, as it would potentially increase or free CA capacity for other programs and services. There was some support to delegate education and outreach activities to other bodies, but not regulatory CA functions.

On the other hand, feedback from the Ottawa session raised a broad range of concerns that this potential action: will lead to the privatization of programs and services, delegate responsibilities away from CAs; impact the ability of CAs to negotiate funding; and that CA programs and services will be duplicated by other organizations leading to inefficiency and increased confusion regarding CA roles. Participants at the London session also conveyed concerns that focused on the need to consider CAs before external partners, and ensuring appropriate oversight and accountability of external partners if programs and services are delegated to them.

Feedback also iterated the idea that it may be more appropriate for a multi-ministerial body to delegate programs and services to other organizations, and that the province should provide appropriate tools and resources, especially funding, with any new delegated programs and services.

D. Giving the Minister the authority to deliver additional natural resource conservation and management programs and services throughout the province

Participant response to this potential action varied by region. Participants at the Sudbury session expressed support for this potential action as it would enable the consistent delivery of CA programs and services outside CA boundaries by MNRF or another organization. They suggested delegating programs and services to other bodies through other legislation. Feedback from Thunder Bay participants highlighted the need to communicate and consult on any proposed changes to the regulations of the Act. Feedback from the remaining sessions is consistent with the comments reported for the preceding potential action.

Other Actions Being Considered

A. Reducing administrative burdens associated with appointing and replacing board members and obtaining approval of board per diems

Participant feedback indicated support for this potential action. Comments regarding per diems revealed a range of concerns that need to be addressed, including reducing the administrative burden associated with obtaining approval of board per diems, particularly if they are appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Participants from London and Ottawa suggested the need to explore existing best practices for approving per diems to avoid OMB approval, or letting the CA board decide. There is

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also some concern that per diems are not equitable across CAs, and that some municipalities permit them while others do not.

Feedback also highlighted the need to clarify the process to appoint and remove CA board members. Concerns were expressed at the Newmarket session that some CA boards are not reflective of watershed stakeholders (e.g., farmers, landowners, etc.) and that there is a need to balance CA board composition to reduce political influence. Participants highlighted the need for more provincial guidance and collaboration with CAs, and suggested establishing an accreditation process to appoint members (e.g., university accreditation panels) or a code of conduct to address these concerns.

B. Aligning board terms with the municipal elections cycle

Participants at the London, Newmarket and Ottawa sessions generally support aligning board terms with the municipal elections cycle. They also highlighted: the need to maintain flexibility for CAs; consider term limits for board members (e.g., 8 years), and consider appointing members as outlined in the Municipal Act (i.e., eliminate the three-year maximum term). There were no comments specific to this potential action from participants at the Thunder Bay and Sudbury sessions.

C. Developing and orientation and training program for board members

There was agreement among participants regarding the need to develop a provincially mandated orientation and training program for board members to ensure that they are informed of their role and function, particularly their fiduciary obligations. Feedback indicated that many CAs already provide training for board members; it was suggested that training tools and best practices should be shared via CO. Some participants also feel that the provision of board member training should be led by CO, with provincial support.

D. Developing a coordinated communications plan outlining any changes to conservation authority operations, programs and services resulting from the review in partnership with municipalities and conservation authorities

Feedback in response to this potential action varied. Participants in London expressed support for a coordinated communications plan, while participants in Newmarket suggested that the province should provide more guidance on communications related to specific issues (e.g., outreach, consultation and managing controversial matters). It was noted in Ottawa that some CAs already coordinate communications, however there is support to align them with CO communications. Participant feedback in Thunder Bay acknowledged the importance of consultation and communication between CAs and the MNRF regarding changes to the regulations of the *CA Act*, and iterated the need to maintain flexibility for CAs. Comments specific to this potential action were not conveyed in Sudbury.

4. Action Ranking Exercise

At the end of each of the engagement sessions, participants were asked to choose the most important potential action under each priority area. The combined results of this optional exercise are presented in the graph below. Note that some attendees did not participate in the ranking because they felt the potential actions do not reflect the fundamental issues affecting CAs. The results in the graph represent the number of attendees that chose to respond and do not represent a statistically significant sample. A total of 90 completed forms were received. The potential actions under each priority area are represented by the letters A to E in the graph below.

