

Scarborough Mirror

Conservation authority calls for moratorium on wind farms in Lake Ontario

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The call for a moratorium on offshore wind projects received more support with a recent vote by the Toronto and Region Conservation board.

The motion by members, which include elected representatives from Toronto and surrounding municipalities and citizen appointees, will be forwarded to the Ministry of the Environment as the TRCA's official comment position on the province's proposed regulations regarding offshore wind turbine projects.

The deadline for submissions was earlier in September, but a previous letter sent by staff included a provision that the letter be approved by the board.

The original staff comment was that the five-kilometre setback for offshore wind projects was adequate, but there were several questions and concerns raised in the letter as well.

"I was not happy with it saying we think it's OK, but here's a whole list of questions we have," said Scarborough Southwest Councillor Paul Ainslie, who sits on the board.

He brought forward a motion instead asking the board to support a moratorium for construction of wind turbines in Lake Ontario, which passed with a majority vote, though it wasn't unanimous.

Guildwood resident Sherri Lange was at the Sept. 17 meeting and pleased with the move. She's also the founding director of Toronto Wind Action.

"It was a very good feeling day," she said.

"Our group and a number of groups have really been lobbying for a moratorium."

Toronto Wind Action, as well as several other wind groups, have raised concerns about turbines affecting human health, water quality, and bird and bat populations.

"There are so many reasons we should be putting the brakes on," Lange said. "Toronto Wind Action just doesn't think turbines in the lake are a very good idea."

She told the Ministry of Environment just that - three or four times - during the commenting period of its proposed regulations surrounding offshore wind projects. While the deadline is now past for public comments to the MOE, the Ministry of Natural Resources is still accepting public comments

regarding a proposal to make Crown land available for wind projects (Lake Ontario would be considered Crown land).

Lange is encouraging people to submit comments to MNR as well, as it is regarding the same basic issue of turbines. The deadline for comment is Monday, Oct. 4.

Not all groups are supportive of the government's proposal for a five-kilometre setback.

"We felt that they were making an excessive blanket rule not based on science and not based on fact," said Emily Alfred of the Toronto Environmental Alliance. "(Regulations) should be based on site specific studies...not as a blanket rule that goes across the province."

TEA submitted a letter to the MOE stating this position and requesting the possibility of exemptions in certain cases where there isn't an impact on habitat or shipping routes, for example.

"Green energy and renewable energy is a really important issue in Ontario and Toronto...We felt it was really important to make this known to the ministry," Alfred said. "The regulations preclude a lot of great projects that could happen across Ontario."

Projects including one proposed by Toronto Hydro that would stretch from Ajax to the Leslie Street Spit. That project was talked about being two to four kilometres offshore as farther out than that the lake bed drops off, which would make the project much more expensive. Toronto Hydro is currently just in the testing phase with a wind anemometer in the lake off the Scarborough Bluffs testing wind speed.

Following the release of the proposed five-kilometre setback regulation, Toronto Hydro said it would continue with its testing, which began in the spring and was expected to take two years.

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