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EOWC presses key rural Eastern Ontario issues at AMO 2016 Conference

Wednesday, August 17, 2016 – During a series of meetings with Provincial Cabinet ministers as part of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) annual conference held this week in Windsor, Ontario, members of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC) raised a number of significant issues facing the region, including:

- Extending natural gas into rural communities for the residential and commercial sector;
- Bringing improvements and expansions to the hydroelectricity transmission grid, on an urgent basis, to serve the growing needs of businesses and industries across the region;
- Making mobile broadband services available to businesses and residents by closing the coverage and capacity gaps in the current cell networks, while building a first responder public safety network that can serve as a model for the provincial and federal levels;
- Urging the provincial government to focus on plans for growing rural Eastern Ontario's economy rather than creating more barriers to development;
- Stemming the rising tide of Ontario Provincial Police and other emergency services costs, which are impacting the ability to invest in local municipal infrastructure.

“In the case of energy costs, they are increasing at an unprecedented pace, with no end in sight, and the reality is that rural customers are shouldering a disproportionate burden compared to their urban counterparts,” stated Peter Emon, EOWC Chair and Warden of Renfrew County. “High energy costs force families to choose between electricity bills and other basic necessities and services, posing a growing threat of ‘energy poverty’ across our region and the province. They also hurt the growth potential of our businesses, which have also expressed the urgent need to address grid reliability issues and high expansion costs.”

As part of its advocacy work during the AMO Conference, the EOWC delivered a written formal submission to the Ministry of Energy regarding the Province's next *Long-Term Energy Plan*. The submission includes recommendations around making the necessary infrastructure investments needed for the expansion of energy systems; bringing a reliable flow of natural gas and electricity to rural and remote areas of Eastern Ontario; and advocating for more affordable energy solutions for rural Ontario.



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“We also spoke directly with Ontario ministers about other concerns that create significant financial burdens on municipal budgets, such as the rising cost of policing and emergency services, the broken interest arbitration system contributing to those escalating costs, and the current legal system known as joint and several liability that holds municipalities financially responsible for issues often out of their control and jurisdictions, and raises their insurance premiums,” added Vice-Chair J. Murray Jones, Warden of the County of Peterborough.

“Municipal taxpayers are increasingly realizing that local governments cannot continue to manage these costs and that the Province must take action on these issues to ensure we can continue to fix our roads, bridges and water systems,” added Chair Emon. “The EOWC has always sought to develop a reasoned, research and professional approach to working with the provincial government, which explains the importance of preparing for opportunities like the ones held over the past few days in Windsor.”

The EOWC represents 13 Counties and single-tier municipalities and 90 local municipalities across rural Eastern Ontario, and has a proven track record of providing accurate research to upper levels of government and completing projects on time and on budget. With its history of success, the EOWC’s goal is to make Eastern Ontario a model region for both Ontario and Canada.

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