

# SaveTheBalaFalls.com

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August 22, 2017

The Honourable Chris Ballard  
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change  
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Dear Minister Ballard:

## **An open letter to the Honourable Chris Ballard, Ontario's new Minister of the Environment and Climate Change**

Congratulations on your appointment as Ontario's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

For over 12 years, a proponent has been pursuing the construction of a hydro-electric generating station at the Bala falls, which is about 25 km north-west of Gravenhurst.

Bala is known mainly for the Bala falls, which are key to the area's economy, yet the proposed project would take more than 94% of the water from these falls (for comparison, to support the local economy and by international agreement, no more than 50% of the water can be diverted away from the Niagara Falls).



While much of Muskoka is cottages, clearly, these people in the above photograph are having a memorable Canadian experience, which is accessible to all – in Bala people can park for free in the Township-owned parking lot across the road, they can picnic for free in the MNR-owned park directly adjacent to these falls, they can swim, wade and Scuba dive for free, and they can rent a kayak or canoe across the road to go exploring.

## Unaddressed dangers

But this would all become too dangerous if the proposed project proceeded, as the treacherously-fast and turbulent water from hydro-electric generating stations is **deadly** to those nearby, as tragically shown by the 2008 drowning of a 16-year-old boy due to the nearby Wilson's Falls generating station. Alarming, the proposed Bala generating station would be even more dangerous as it would:

- 1) Have **more than ten times the flow**.
- 2) Start, without warning, at about noon on summer days – even though this would not comply with the MNRF's safety requirements.
- 3) Be in an area far more popular for in-water recreation.

Even though it would be unprecedented to build a hydro-electric generating station in the middle of a popular in-water recreational area, the Bala proponent refuses to release their safety plan to the public, and so far has only shown that their plans would be dangerous and deceptive. For example, the fast water would extend hundreds of feet **outside** of the proposed downstream safety boom, and this would not comply with the Canadian Dam Association's public safety guidelines.

## Unapproved changes

While the proposed Bala project did receive environmental approval in 2013, the proponent has since made many environmentally-significant changes, for example:

- 1) During the proposed construction, due to the high probability of a heavy rainstorm which could flood Lake Muskoka, the MNRF can require the proponent to remove their cofferdam on 24 hours notice, which:
  - a) Would wash deleterious substances from the proposed construction site into the Moon River.
  - b) Could dump the contaminated water and sediment from proponent's water treatment settling tanks into the Moon River.

The proponent does not have environmental approval for these negative impacts, and the public has not even been informed of them.

- 2) The proponent has recently submitted a safety plan to the MNRF, but refuses to disclose this crucial document to the public.
- 3) After committing that the roof of their concrete building directly beside the beautiful Bala falls would not rise above road level, the proponent changed their plans so the ugly thing would be more than two storeys above the road, blocking the important view down the Moon River just as the condominiums in Toronto block the view of the lake. Tourists won't come to Bala to see ugly concrete buildings or the dry rocks where the falls used to be.

Clearly, these are environmentally-significant changes. The *Environmental Assessment Act* gives the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change the authority to require these be subject to environmental assessment, including informing and consulting with the public

and indigenous groups, as is required by both the MOECC's and MNRF's *Statement of Environmental Values*.

Furthermore, the proponent has not replied to the last 11 letters we have sent to them, and the MNRF has refused to meet with us to discuss these issues. This staid process would be remedied by the MOECC requiring the proponent to submit an Addendum, as is required by the MOECC's *Guide to Environmental Assessment Requirements for Electricity Projects*.

### **Our requests**

Minister Ballard, unfortunately, the proponent has announced they intend to start work within days, we therefore request:

- That the MOECC inform the proponent that while their 2013 environmental approval is still valid, as they have made environmentally-significant changes to their plans since then, if the proponent wishes to proceed with these new plans, they must submit an Addendum. This would ensure that all are informed of the negative impacts of the new plans and the proposed mitigation, and so that the public has an opportunity to provide comment, as is required by both the *Environmental Assessment Act* and the Ministries' *Statements of Environmental Values*.
- To meet with you, to discuss the safe way to proceed with this proposed project.

Please contact us at [info@SaveTheBalaFalls.com](mailto:info@SaveTheBalaFalls.com), we would be happy to provide additional documents and explanation..

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mitchell Shnier".

Mitchell Shnier, on behalf of [SaveTheBalaFalls.com](http://SaveTheBalaFalls.com)