

# DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

## AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

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Infrastructure

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario supports bill to create water authority

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A private member's bill that could create an Ontario water regulatory board would help address public water and wastewater infrastructure sustainability, says a civil construction organization.

"It speaks to many things we have been advocating for a very long time and the goals contained in the 2002 legislation (Bill 175 Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act)," said Andy Manahan, executive director, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

"We think David Caplan's private member's bill is important and whether it takes on another form, the intention is very important."

Caplan, Don Valley East MPP, introduced Bill 237, The Sustainable Water Improvement and Maintenance Act (SWIM), before the Queen's Park winter break. Bill 237 builds on work dating back to Bill 175. Caplan's bill, if passed, would create an Ontario water regulatory board to oversee standards for water and wastewater treatment across the province.

The commitment in Bill 237 to full cost recovery, consumption/smart metering and investment decisions based on "solid forecasting rather than on crisis management" are key, said Manahan.

A 2009 RCCAO report, Benchmarking Infrastructure Funding in Ontario: Towards Sustainable Policies says Ontario needs to be more sophisticated in addressing infrastructure asset management, establishing long-term funding commitments for infrastructure renewal and then leveraging this funding to encourage municipalities to adopt best practices in asset management.

Caplan has said that by getting a handle on the costs of managing and maintaining public water and wastewater systems, a regulatory water board could encourage improved water recycling and inspections and better respond to issues such as leakage within the system.

The RCCAO benchmarking report found that 25 per cent of all treated drinking water in Ontario leaks into the ground because of aging pipe infrastructure, which results in a \$700 million annual cost burden on ratepayers.

RCCAO hopes the province will hold consultations with interested stakeholders on Bill 237, including an analysis of how a proposed governance model might work either through an Ontario Water Board or similar body that would include provincial, municipal and civil construction representatives.

Finding answers to the question of how small and urban municipalities, with an insufficient tax base, would achieve full cost recovery through requirements in new water and waste water legislation, slowed the implementation of Bill 175 in 2002, industry insiders have argued in the past.

However, a 2007 commissioned report by RCCAO called *Water and Wastewater Asset Management in the GTA: Challenges and opportunities*, authored by Tamer El-Diraby, a University of Toronto professor, recommended municipalities, both big and small, should take the lead in asset management which will then define the role federal and provincial governments should take.

By pooling their expertise and resources in initiatives with benchmarks, it could help establish a vision and strategy for water and wastewater assets, El-Diraby concluded.