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National Assembly to adopt Bill 66: the acceleration of certain construction projects is worrisome and must remain the exception

MONTREAL, December 11, 2020 - Yesterday, the National Assembly adopted Bill 66, a bill that raises concerns about its impact on the environment, despite improvements to the bill with regard to its scope and public access to information. The bill weakens environmental requirements on targeted projects in order to speed up BAPE assessments.

The government chose to dismiss several proposals for amendments aimed at reducing the risks associated with such legislation, for example creating a dedicated team to analyze projects, or maintaining public hearings as the default requirement for consultations.

The signing organizations (listed below) are concerned that the bill makes analysis carried out under ministerial authorization and environmental assessments easier to achieve even when environmental risks are high. The importance of public hearings is also impacted, since the bill gives the Minister large discretionary power whether to give the BAPE a consultation mandate, and to choose the format of these consultations. This negates the oldest and best-known form of public participation on environmental issues in Québec—the possibility for any citizen to request a public hearing on projects targeted by the acceleration measures.

“This bill is a slippery slope. Such measures should not, under any circumstances, pave the way for environmental requirements being permanently and systematically weakened. Climate emergency requires us to speed up our ecological and energy transition—not to speed up the approval of projects at the expense of the environment and land management,” warn the signing organizations.

The signing organizations will watch how the legislation is being implemented and will continue to advocate for a just, green, and inclusive recovery—essential to ensure the health and safety of the population.

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Signataires:

- Geneviève Paul, Executive Director, Québec Environmental Law Centre/Centre québécois du droit de l'environnement (CQDE)
- Marc-André Viau, Director of Government Relations, Équiterre
- Alice-Anne Simard, Executive Director, Nature Québec
- Martin Vaillancourt, Executive Director, Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement du Québec (RNCREQ)
- Alain Branchaud, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)