



May 16, 2025

Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
18th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto ON
M5G 2N4

Re: [ERO #025-0391](#) - Special Economic Zones Act, 2025

Ontario Nature has significant objections to the proposed *Special Economic Zones Act*, which has the potential to disregard Indigenous rights, sound environmental planning and the concerns of local communities.

Most significantly, this proposal would grant powers to the Minister to exempt “trusted proponents” and “designated projects” within “special economic zones” (SEZs) from having to comply with provincial and municipal laws. Yet, these terms are not defined in the Act and are left entirely to Cabinet’s discretion without essential checks and balances. This will enable the government to unilaterally circumvent important environmental and community safeguards established in law.

While the Environmental Registry posting notes SEZs will apply to “vetted projects” and “trusted proponents”, no criteria are specified for how vetting and trust will be measured or how the public will be involved in this assessment. Ontario Nature is deeply concerned that this creates the potential for the government to cherry pick proponents and projects to exempt from public safeguards without the necessary transparency or public oversight.

Overall, the proposed SEZs risk depriving impacted communities, Indigenous Peoples and the wider public from their say. This could lead to breaches of constitutionally protected Indigenous rights, including the duty to consult, as well as public participation rights under the Environmental Bill of Rights. Disappointingly, Indigenous Peoples’ right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is not mentioned anywhere in this proposal. FPIC must be the bedrock of any decisions, policies or legislation impacting the territories of Indigenous Peoples.

In conclusion, the power to provide exemptions from the law must be a rare exception, not the norm. In such rare instances, measures should be subject to clear checks and balances like public oversight and time limitations. Without these, Schedule 9 raises significant concerns about whether the health of Ontarians and our environment will be protected. Furthermore,



Schedule 9 does not respect the rule of law due to the proposal's vagueness and lack of limits on discretionary power of the Lieutenant Governor in Council or Minister.

For these reasons, Ontario Nature is calling for the withdrawal of Schedule 9.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Morris".

Tony Morris
Conservation Policy and Campaigns Director
Ontario Nature