

**From:** [PF-Mailbox-01](#)  
**To:** [Norio, Ann-Marie](#); [Trennum, Matthew](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee  
**Date:** Monday, March 22, 2021 12:10:10 PM

**From:** Niagara Region Website  
**Sent:** Monday, 22 March 2021 12:10:00 (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)  
**To:** Clerks  
**Subject:** Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee

## Request to Speak at a Standing Committee

To reply, copy the email address from below and put into 'To'. (if resident entered their email address)

Name

Kai Wiens

Address

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City

Niagara on the Lake

Postal

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Phone

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Email

[REDACTED]

Organization

member of the agricultural industry

standing committee

Regional Council

Presentation Topic

## Ramsar Designation

Presentation includes slides

No

Previously presented topic

No

Presentation Details

i would like to bring forward many unanswered questions regarding this endorsement and the legal opinion that was received by the Region

Video Consent

Yes



## **Ramsar Delegation**

### **March 25,2021**

Thank you for allowing me this time to respond to the potential designation of the Niagara River as a Ramsar Site. I think that we should all take pride in the Niagara River and its majesty and grander. It is a truly remarkable engineering feat of nature.

Allow me to introduce myself to the council. My name is Kai Wiens and I am a second-generation Family Farmer. I have farmed in NOTL for 34 years and my family since the late '60s coming from South America as many families at that time did and settled in the Niagara Region. In my many years of farming, starting in my early 20's I have taken part in almost every agriculture committee afforded to me from provincially, OFVGA to regional such as NPFVGA, APAC, and OFA and locally Town of NOTL Ag committee which I chair and the irrigation committee and many more committees including tourism and founding member of the MNR Land Care Niagara to mention but a few. I say this not to boost but to share with you that I have taken the time to educate myself on many aspects of my industry and my surroundings.

I do not wish to denigrate the Ramsar name or mission, I think it is a great initiative and one we should be proud that they are interested in Niagara. But, and however, my concerns;

The Ramsar designation does not come simply voluntarily. They may suggest that but once we look a bit deeper, we find layers of management responsibilities and costs associated to the moniker. For example;

1. Who is on this management team and how are they chosen?

Are they chosen by the community, stakeholders, Region Council, province, Ramsar itself?

2. Who has oversight of this team?

What oversight body do they answer to?

Who has liability if a bad or costly decision is made and how do they compensate land owners, stakeholders, innocent community folk?

3. What are the responsibilities of the members?

Can they arbitrarily make rules, processes, permits, regulations enter in MOU's?

The answer they will say is no its a voluntary designation and can be removed, withdrawn at any time. Well can it? What if now many in the community unburdened by Ramsar decision or policy think its a nice thing to have? How do you fight that?

The moral dilemma comes into play, committee has always been there for a long time, what then?

No committee with a management team doesn't want or need power, jurisdiction? This committee will be no different. It will require an office, staff, budget. From that it will push to be heard, then it becomes louder when not heard so it becomes appeased and then a position is formed and now a voice at the table and voila a governing body.

As yet another governing body. So now my agriculture bias arrives. We in Niagara use the Niagara River as an irrigation source, one of many but a major one. As farmers we have a tough time to agree with one another and a fiercely independent group but when it comes to a community irrigation system, we have come together in a united fashion for the past 40 years. At this time, we have oversight from MNR, MECC, Niagara Parks, Conservation Authority, US-Canada water taking, Permit to take water, Federal Ocean and Fisheries, Town of Niagara on the Lake and I bet more, I lose count. The various ministries are kept informed of what we are doing, how much water we take and so forth. We have endless paperwork already. To have another governing body to answer to is unnecessary. The Niagara River is an essential part of our irrigation strategy. Irrigation water is no longer a nice thing to have, rather a business necessity. Irrigation helps us in getting water to our crops but also helps to reduce field temperatures after application for as much as four days. This helps in our crops not lose moisture giving the fruit longer storage life, better shelf life and increases flavour, have you ever bitten into a peach that tastes mealy or fibrous due to moisture loss? The

system allows dozens of farm families have access to water at any time, irrigating thousands of acres. There are also many private irrigation pumps along the river for growers who irrigate directly from the river. Because irrigation is such a fundamental part of farming today that allows growers compete on the world market for size, colour, quality and taste, we can not allow another governing body to impeded our legal right to the water. Ontario legislature bill 88 brought forward and passed by the late Mr. Micheal Dietsch MPP. The growers have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars privately for irrigation equipment, piping and other infrastructure and as a community we just built a 2 million dollar pumping station in Queenston to access water for our irrigators. If a committee holds us ransom to access a vital part of our management strategy that would be heartbreaking and an emotional blow to many farm families who only want to create a food source for Ontarians and a financial life for their families. This is a voice at the table that really is not necessary but could be harmful?

In 'the designation and management of Ramsar Sites "a practitioners guide" book we read in section

### **M1.3 ASSESS THE THREATS TO THE SITE**

Threats to your wetlands can vary in scale, seriousness and can be actual or perceived. Major examples might include: water extraction upstream, drainage, invasive species, urban development, climate change and pollution.

Is water extraction another word for irrigation?

Farms use drainage to keep their fields dry for growing crops which may find its way in to the Niagara River, are our tile drainage now part of the Ramsar protocol?

Invasive species, fish, phragmites, other and then who is responsible for the cleanup?

Urban development does not need another governing body?

If there are possible or actual threats to the site, then this should be reported to the Ramsar Secretariat.

Reported to Ramsar Secretariat, does not sound so voluntary now or passive?

Does the Ramsar Secretariat take position behind or in front of, who? Which federal body, Oceans and fishery? There could be immense costs incurred to a land owner, governing body?

The other concern of course is that Ramsar would also take control of tributaries that enter or spill into the Niagara River. This might impact more than we may know such as water treatment plants, road wash and more, I'll leave that to others to contemplate

The Ramsar designation carries with it many other responsibilities that we may not be aware of?

Let me ask of council and staff how many people have read the full Ramsar literature? Are we all aware;

1. 22 Hand books and some in their 5<sup>th</sup> addition?
2. 10 Technical studies
3. 10 Briefing books?

That's 42 books

That's a lot of reading? Are we up on all that they are asking?

As an example; M1.1 What is a Ramsar Information Sheet, RIS, and why does it need to be updated every 6 years?

A RIS requires information on the criteria under which the site qualifies as a Ramsar Site, the physical, ecological, hydrological, social and cultural aspects of the site, ecosystem services, as well as current laws / regulations and conflict management together with a site boundary map. Much of this information would have been gathered during the site assessment process.

Understanding and documenting the baseline condition of your Ramsar Site at the time of designation is essential. This is because it forms the baseline from which monitoring will then show whether the site is changing negatively or positively, so that appropriate management action can then be taken to maintain the services and benefits that the site provides.

Understanding the baseline , doesn't sound passive to me, sounds like a committee with a voice that wants to be heard?

**M2.1 ESTABLISH A CROSS-SECTORAL SITE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

A site management committee can take responsibility for the decision-making process and future management of your site, with the intention to maintain a balance of all the services for which the site is important.

The committee can serve as an effective and authoritative communication mechanism between site staff and your country's Administrative Authority and National Focal Point.

**M2.2 DRAFT A SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A management plan is an essential document to guide all aspects of the site operation and administration. It is used to ensure that your site is managed to maintain or improve those essential ecological and hydrological functions which ultimately provide its benefits and services.

This sounds like a lot of management.

What are the next steps involved, do we know, who handles that, the committee with the most to gain or is there a new management team? How are they chosen/elected/appointed? What oversight is put in place, who finances this management team and pays what wages? Why has the agriculture community asked the region for a legal opinion on Ramsar and farming? Why would a benign designation require that question and that begs the question of how much more time and money will be spent on this topic, how much has been spent? One might think this is voluntary and a nice designation why all the costs and staff time?

Are we sure that we know what the future might be. Other Ramsar locations; are they populated as ours is, as in demographics, industry, farming for profit, established tourism industry?

They say the Ramsar designation will aid in tourism, how, who has gone to a Ramsar location to vacation and does NF or NOTL need the help?

My request of council is look deeper into this request. It sounds good on the surface but what lies beneath? This is an international designation from a recognized organization, are we prepared for it? There is a lot of reading to do, and if we wait out at a later date the world may frown upon that idea not knowing the finer details as to the negative impact on its stakeholders and perhaps more so one of those stakeholders who is deeply dependent on the Niagara River for their livelihood, the peach farmer who needs to irrigate his produce in a dry year and drain their land in a wet year but does not conform to a

committee made up by unelected people with little or no oversight who may not have the land owners best interest in mind or rather their own agenda.

Are we really sure? My family's livelihood could be at risk, I am nervous I hope you are as well? As I mentioned I have and I do sit on many committees taking much of my time, time away from both my business and my family. I do this not to be remembered in some archives but to pave the road for my next generation to continue what my wife, Sharla and I have built. My son Dylan who farms with us today has three young children, 7,5 and the monster at 3 years old. I look at how do I give them a legacy they can continue to hand down after them and certainly after my wife and I have left the industry. When the greenbelt was coming into conversation in the early 2000's I was there to give input but more so in 2014's when the review started. I went to the influencers, sat on the committees and hope I made a difference. I think we did; Niagara was given privileges such as a 15m buffer from drainage ditches rather than a 30m buffer for buildings and such and that we can farm up to the bank of the drainage ditches rather than meters away, again impacting on our smaller parcel sizes and intensive farming. These were some of the few significant wins for Niagara on the Lake due to its smaller parcel sizes, concessions we are grateful for. We managed to keep surplus dwellings in legislation both in the PPS and Greenbelt act/policy. At a different time, I had a conversation with then ag critic the honorable Ernie Hardeman now Ag Minister at an OFA annual meeting, He is in Oxford county and they do not allow for surplus dwellings. He had me in minutes convinced that surplus dwellings were a bad zoning policy. I came home and realized here in NOTL with expensive homes I would have a difficult time expanding if I had to buy a house that was worth more than the land I was purchasing, how do I successfully manage that, In Oxford county and other areas of Ontario surplus dwellings are perhaps a bad policy, not here in NOTL. I say this to make you aware of the decision you are making for the next and then the next generation. Are you sure of what you are signing on to? Will my 3yr old monster sit at my dinning room table in 20yrs frustrated because she can no longer draw water for irrigation from the Niagara River or drain her land because it eventually drains into the Niagara River? Will she need permits and memorandums of understanding to simply continue to farm and feed Canada? My wife and I fiercely



proud of the operation we have built and want to see it continue but more regulations will not make it appetizing to the next and the next generation.

I know it may be gratifying to be the signer to this wonderful cause but have you read the 42 books that accompany your signature? My grandchildren will be impacted by your decision today. You will have moved on but they are hopefully still here to continue my family's legacy of providing Ontario produce to the rest of Canada. It's very satisfying and comforting to wrap yourself in an environmental blanket and say "see what we have done for the future of the Niagara River" but my grandchildren and my neighbours grandchildren may be the ones who do not see this as a thick soft environmental blanket to curl up in, but rather a smothering tarp that does not allow them the ability of farming similar to my generation and your drive on a warm summers day.

Thank you for giving me your time.