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**LISTEN TO EASTERN ONTARIO VOICES IN NEW RURAL PLAN,  
WARDENS TELL PROVINCIAL MINISTERS**

TORONTO—The heads of counties and rural single-tier municipalities in Eastern Ontario today urged two senior cabinet ministers to address the region's concerns as they revamp the Province's Rural Plan.

At a meeting with the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, members of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC) said that they were ready and willing to work with the Province on redesigning the plan.

"The ministers were receptive to our suggestion," said Bob Sweet, Warden of Renfrew County and chair of EOWC. "We feel that our involvement is very important to ensure that the revised plan reflects the region's unique problems and challenges. We are willing to share our expertise and knowledge, to ensure that the new plan has a better focus on the needs of Ontario's rural population."

Sweet noted, for example, that the Eastern Ontario rural tax base – which is overwhelmingly residential – is under serious pressure. "Growth in assessments is slowing, while the Province's new formula for funding its share of programs we deliver on its behalf puts a huge strain on our resources," he said. "Our members are also struggling with the maintenance and investment needs of ageing assets, especially the more than 1,200 kilometres of provincial highways that were downloaded to us by the previous government."

Sweet said that the Eastern Ontario representatives were encouraged by the ministers' willingness to listen and to consider their proposal. "We look forward to moving forward on a plan that helps Eastern Ontario and other rural areas of Ontario," he said.

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