LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE

POSITION STATEMENT

On

Ballast Water Management

The Great Lakes have been subject to invasions of aquatic species since the settlement of the region by Europeans. Since the 1800's, over 140 non-native aquatic species have been introduced in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Some of these introductions have been intentional, and have resulted in benefits to society. However, the unplanned (ballast) introductions of non-native, harmful aquatic species have caused ecological, economic and public health impacts that threaten the value of Great Lake's resources.

Since 1959, most unintentional introductions of species into the Great Lakes are traceable to shipping. Approximately 85% of the vessels entering the St. Lawrence Seaway have "NOBOB"(No Ballast On Board) status and are exempt from laws requiring a high-seas exchange of ballast water. However, these vessels contain residual ballast water, sediment and sludge totaling several metric tons, which is later discharged in the course of changing cargoes. The total amount of ballast dumped into the Great Lakes is approximately six million metric tons per year. Since this ballast is not presently treated or filtered, non-native aquatic organisms can survive the journey across oceans from fresh water shipping ports around the world – to be discarded alive in Great Lakes waters via ballasting and deballasting.

Several non-native, and very destructive organisms are believed to have entered the Great Lakes via ballast in the past 15 years including: zebra mussels, round gobies, European ruffe and Russian water flea. All of these species have had profound influences on native species and food webs. *Diporeia*, an important food item of young lake trout and yellow perch has declined substantially in SE Lake MI due to zebra mussel filtration. Zebra mussels alone have caused the near extinction of native clams in Lake St. Clair and in the western basin of Lake Erie. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the economic impact caused by the zebra mussel at $5 billion over the next 10 years to U.S. and Canadian industries in the Great Lakes. The European ruffe is already the most numerous species in some areas of Lake Superior and is estimated to have the potential to cause devastating impacts on yellow perch and walleye fisheries. Exotic water fleas disrupt sportfishing by clinging to fishing lines and clogging fishing poles and reels.

On average, at least one new non-native organism is introduced into the Great Lakes each year. The next introduction could have even more devastating effects than have been observed with the present exotic species. Because of this severe threat to Lake Erie's aquatic ecosystem, including its commercial and recreational fisheries, from any new introductions of exotic organisms by ballast exchange, the Lake Erie Committee encourages and supports efforts to totally control all biological components of ballast within the Great Lakes Basin.

Adopted:
Annual Lake Erie Committee Meeting
March 29-30, 2000
Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON