

Great Lakes Commission Position Statement
for
PEIS for Ballast Water Discharge Standards
Public Meetings/Comment Period

Submitted by Kevin Walters, Great Lakes Commission

The Great Lakes Commission is a binational public agency that promotes the orderly, integrated and comprehensive development, use and conservation of the water and related natural resources of the Great Lakes basin and St. Lawrence River. Its members include the eight Great Lakes states with associate member status for the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec. Commission responsibilities, as specified in its mission statement, include applying sustainable development principles in addressing issues related to resource management, environmental protection, transportation and economic development. This entails providing accurate and objective information on public policy issues, an effective forum for developing and coordinating public policy, and a unified voice on Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River issues for its member jurisdictions.

The Great Lakes Commission provides secretariat services for the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, a regional panel of the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force mandated under the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control of 1990. Panel directives include identifying Great Lakes aquatic nuisance species (ANS) priorities and communicating these priorities to the national ANS Task Force; coordinating ANS research, information/education and policy development activities at the regional level; and informing and educating public and private interests on the importance of ANS prevention and control in the Great Lakes.

This statement is presented on behalf of the Great Lakes Commission, and reflects the position of the organization on the ballast water management issue (see the Commission's Resolution on [Ballast Water Management](#)). The Commission's position was informed by the [Great Lakes Panel's Policy Statement on Ballast Water Management](#), developed in March 2001. The Great Lakes Commission recognizes that ballast water (including entrained solids) from ocean-going commercial vessels is a primary vector for the introduction of ANS to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system. The organisms discharged from ballast water are a threat to the integrity of the ecosystem and many water-dependent sectors of the economy. The Great Lakes Commission recognizes ANS introduction and spread via ballast water as a priority environmental concern demanding immediate attention.

The objective of ballast water discharge standards should be to eliminate ballast-associated ANS introductions into waters of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system. Reduced ANS dispersal between the lakes through the development and application of a timely, scientifically based, environmentally sound and economically viable binational ballast water management program should also be a priority. Science-based criteria must be established to develop standards upon which regulations/guidelines are based. These criteria will provide the benchmark by which ballast water exchange, management practices and best available treatment technologies can be evaluated with the ultimate goal of eliminating ANS discharges.

The Great Lakes Panel's policy statement presents a review of 41 recommendations in the areas of establishment of criteria for ballast water management practices/treatment technologies; scope, consistency and coordination of laws and programs; and technology options and research needs. The Great Lakes Commission urges the U.S. Coast Guard to carefully consider these recommendations on ballast water discharge as standards are developed.

The Great Lakes Commission advises against consideration of *Alternative 3: No Action* as listed in the *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Ballast Water Discharge Standards - Scoping Information Packet*. Under the current regulatory regime, open-ocean ballast exchange has been found to have limited effectiveness due to the survival of some resistant forms of ANS (e.g., euryhaline organisms, resting stages, viruses and other pathogens). There is clearly a need for more information to determine the extent to which current regulations, guidelines, and standards concerning ballast water exchange have mitigated the introduction and spread of ANS in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system. Another significant issue that needs to be addressed under the current regulatory regime is the exemption of “no ballast on board” (NOBOB) vessels. Residual ballast water and sediment in the ballast tanks of these ships may contain organisms and their resting stages that can be discharged (when new water is added to the ballast tank) and later released in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system or other waters. Additionally, ships which only operate within the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system (“lakers”) pose a significant risk of spreading established populations of ANS (both inter- and intralake) in ballast tanks because open-ocean ballast exchange is not applicable.

Regional ballast water standards should be implemented through a coordinated, binational approach that involves a partnership of government entities, the maritime industry, research community, citizen environmental groups and other relevant stakeholders. Coordination is particularly essential with the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, the International Joint Commission, the Ballast Water Shipping Committee of the ANS Task Force, the Canadian Marine Advisory Council and the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

Alternatives must be identified and evaluated in a coordinated, efficient and timely manner. This is critically important and challenging due to the various management options being considered, the multiplicity of parties involved, the lack of clear performance standards, and uncertainties about the effectiveness, cost and operational feasibility of proposed management practices/treatment systems.

In summary, the Commission believes that a ballast water management program based on efficient, effective, scientifically based, environmentally sound and economically viable regulations, guidelines and polices must be developed and implemented on a regional level to prevent the introduction and spread of ANS via commercial shipping. The Great Lakes Commission encourages the U.S. Coast Guard and all other relevant parties to consider the Great Lakes Panel’s policy statement as efforts to develop and implement a Great Lakes ballast water management program move forward.

Contact:
Great Lakes Commission
2805 South Industrial Highway, Suite 100
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-6791
Ph: 734-971-9135 Fax: 734-971-9150 Email: mdonahue@glc.org