

Summary Report

Public Meeting on the Great Lakes Your Voice: St. Catharines



**Wednesday, March 29, 2017
St. Catharines Rowing Club
St. Catharines, ON**

Introduction

The International Joint Commission visited St. Catharines, Ontario as part of public meetings in six communities in the spring of 2017 to gather public comment on the Canadian and US governments' Progress Report of the Parties (PROP) and the IJC's draft Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) report.

During the public roundtable meeting, three presenters summarized progress to improve the water quality of the Grand River and Lake Erie, to reduce nutrient runoffs by practicing sustainable agriculture and using technologies like precision agriculture, and a status update on the Niagara Area of Concern. Two elected officials, Vance Badawey (MP, Niagara Centre) and Jim Bradley (MPP, St. Catharines) as well as Mark LaForme from the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations attended and addressed the crowd of more than 80 area residents from both sides of the border. During the roundtable discussions participants discussed, among other topics, sustainable agriculture, the Grand River and Lake Erie, agriculture and nutrients and Areas of Concern. During the public comment period 11 participants provided Commissioners with their comments about Great Lakes water quality concerns. These comments are summarized below.

The IJC's final TAP report will take these comments into account. Both the St. Catharines-specific and broader regional conclusions and recommendations may also provide direction to the St. Catharines region's residents for collaborating on solutions for unique priorities in their particular watershed.

IJC representation at meeting:

Gordon Walker, Canadian Chair

Lana Pollack, US Chair

Rich Moy, US Commissioner

Richard Morgan, Canadian Commissioner

Trish Morris, Director, IJC Great Lakes Regional Office (GLRO)

Raj Bejankiwar, Physical Scientist/Deputy Director, IJC GLRO

Frank Bevacqua, Public Information Officer, IJC US Section

Matthew Child, Physical Scientist, IJC GLRO

Sally Cole-Misch, Public Affairs Officer, IJC GLRO

Sarah Lobrichon, Acting Public Affairs Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Victor Serveiss, Environmental Advisor, IJC US Section

Allison Voglesong, IJC Michigan Sea Grant Fellow

Cindy Warwick, Policy Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Main Themes of the Roundtable Discussions

- Lack of beach/waterway access; beach closures
- Collaboration with regulators and farmers
- Integration of ecological traditional knowledge and environmental knowledge into the process
- Lack of control for agriculture industry and nutrients and toxic are going into the water
 - identify common causes of nonpoint sources
 - Reduce agricultural runoff, urban sources, and identify methods for storm water management methods
 - Plan with targets for each jurisdiction
 - Additional monitoring to assess situation to go forward
- Decrease of AOC funding that could impeded progress
- Consequence of decreasing water levels on water quality

- Nuclear waste transport
- Microplastics and plastic garbage showing up on beaches
- Sustainable agriculture
- More education and science for farmers to know different technologies for better land use
- Combined sewer overflow
- Niagara AOC shouldn't have been delisted as one of the key objectives was to increase forest cover to 40 percent which was certainly not met

Key Messages from the Afternoon Public Session

Agriculture Runoff

The need for more accessible information, education and dialogue on better land use practices in agriculture to control runoff from farms was raised during the reporting out of the roundtable discussions. Regulators and farmers need to collaborate to identify common causes and sources of nutrients entering the lakes and develop plans with targeted reductions for each jurisdiction. Additional monitoring is needed to assess the situation going forward.

Urbanization, Sewer Management and Regional Water Plans

On the other end of the spectrum, some argued that the blame should not be put on agriculture practices but rather on the urbanization of watersheds and on the management of sewage that affect the water quality and the ecosystem of the Great Lakes. Concerns were raised about how pollution caused by raw sewer overflows, combined sewer overflow and separate sewer overflows have led to high *E.coli* levels in Beaverdams Creek and Shriners Creek in the Niagara region. These sewer overflows and the sewage lagoons in the Niagara Region cause medical problems as they produce high levels of *E.coli*.

Beach accessibility, Area of Concerns and nuclear waste storage

You can have the best water quality, but if you can't access that resource, what is the point? The lack of beach accessibility was noted as an important issue that needs to be solved in the Niagara region. Some areas that used to be accessible for swimming and fishing have been gated off in the region. Another issue raised was the possible lack of funding for the binational Niagara River Area of Concern and how it would impede progress. Finally, the issue of the nuclear repository near the shores of Lake Huron and the transport of nuclear waste was expressed as a looming nuclear threat to the Great Lakes.

Public Comments: (Click hyperlink of participant name to view video comments)

[Jean Grandoni](#) : I am from Niagara Falls, Ontario and am concerned about the pollution caused by raw sewage overflows, including combined, separated sewer overflows and pump station overflows. I am concerned about discharges in the Shriners Creek which flows into the Niagara River. Urban runoff is also affecting fish habitat. I am concerned about the causes of pollution, illegal dumping, floodplain filling, and no regard for headwater protection. The fact that there is no proper watershed planning is upsetting. Much of these issues are preventable.

[George Jardine, Citizens Against Unsanitary Sewage Effluent](#): I am concerned about the sewage lagoons in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. Dangerous levels of *E.coli* is generated from the lagoons which can cause medical problems. The temporary sewage lagoon in Willoughby Township was only supposed to last 20 years, but is it still in force and was never shut down.

[John Bacher, Sierra Club and Preservation of Agricultural Lands](#): I recommend that the IJC to look into how the urbanization of watersheds affects the water quality and the ecosystem of the Great

Lakes. Beaverdams Creek and Shriners Creek in the Niagara Region are both urbanized watersheds, and as a result have astronomical levels of *E.coli* in their water. The IJC should study urban demand. I believe that there is no need for more urban zoning in the Niagara Region.

[Ann Porter Bonilla, Provincial Council of Women of Ontario:](#) The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario recommends that radionuclides be declared a Chemical of Mutual Concern. And we also ask that the research, based on the gaps of scientific knowledge and identified by the 1997 IJC nuclear task force report, begin as soon as possible. There should be an initiative to make up for lost time as part of a binational plan to address the grave and growing public concern with the strong action to protect the Great Lakes from various nuclear threats. More improvements also need to be made on identifying other Chemicals of Mutual Concern.

[Christopher McLeod, Waterlution Great Art and Great Lakes:](#) I am a social engagement artist and I just started a new project called Great Art for Great Lakes. I believe social engagement still isn't meeting the mark. I see a room with maybe 100 people. If the public doesn't know about the great work you're doing then they're just not going to get involved and support your work. If you are doing great work, get out there be creative and connect people with what you're doing.

[David Alexander, Cross Border Consultants:](#) We need to look at how energy is used and how it moves within the Great Lakes area. We need to look at ongoing citizen engagement from a charter perspective as a way to get people engaged. Data should be made open and available to get people, citizen scientists and organizations involved in the process.

[Ian Brindle, retired professor from Brock University:](#) I think that it's very important that we reinstate citizen activism in Great Lakes activities. I would like to share two examples of the law of unintended consequences. 1) Lampricide is harming fish it was not intended for. 2) Flame retardants are relatively new and their toxicity is not completely known. These chemicals are the silent things that people don't see and don't think about it.

[Jason Hamby:](#) We find zebra mussels when we clean the fishing nets of the north shores. I've seen dead fish from botulism in Lake Erie. I would like to encourage the IJC to establish more platforms where concerns about the Great Lakes are shared. Please bring more Native American and First Nations involvement and dialogue to the table.

[Bruce Timms, Regional Councillor for St. Catharines:](#) I sit on the board of the Conservation Authority and I have brought a land owner stewardship guide for Walkers Creek and Twelve Mile Creek for the public to pick up. These guides are a small part of the solution, but we are hoping that they are helpful with the urbanized watershed within the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's watershed.

[Janice Gilbert, Ontario Phragmites Working Group:](#) Our biggest threat to coastal areas right now is Phragmites. We are losing our habitat, biodiversity and wildlife species. We need our government to help us get the herbicide that controls the Phragmites and we need an eradication program in place in for the province.

[Alice Barker, degree in environmental chemistry:](#) My concern is the EPA funding cuts that will affect our air, water and land. They allow mine tailings to go into streams. They've basically ripped up the Clean Water Act, and let power plants throw out all the garbage they want. What can we do about it?

Meeting with the Métis Nation of Ontario

March 25, 2017, Intercontinental Hotel, Toronto, Ontario

At the request of the Métis Nation of Ontario, members of the International Joint Commission made a presentation to Nation representatives during the second annual Métis Nation of Ontario meeting with Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) co-chairs. The presentation was on the Commission's Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and comments on the Parties Report on Progress, the TAP or any other issues of concern in the Great Lakes were welcomed. The meeting was attended by approximately 18 Métis Nation representatives.

Key Messages

Métis representatives called for better protection of the Great Lakes for future generations, particularly Georgian Bay, noted the need for better IJC engagement with the Métis and better representation of the Métis in the TAP report, and flagged concerns about climate change. All comments received at the meeting will be taken into account. The three comments received follow.

Gerry Clark, President of Clearwaters' Métis Council: I don't want to beat a dead horse here, but we talked about it this morning. I have to bring it to you: climate change. First of all, all the work you are doing is phenomenal. It is one of the biggest concerns I see right now, and I don't know how you are going to deal with it. You got your partners in the US, but how are you going to deal with the Trump Administration who doesn't seem to care about climate change? As a matter of fact, he doesn't seem to think there is such a thing as climate change, and that really bothers me because they are opening up things like coal mines and what not. They do not care. Again, I do not know how it is going to affect your job and everything.

Ernie Gatien, Region 4, Métis Council: On the draft report, page 75, it says engaging the public. Maybe I am missing it someplace; I don't see where it says engaging Métis or First Nations, so I think that is a real shortfall. Also, on the pamphlet that I got, it says Great Lakes connection Sault Ste. Marie region residents and it speaks to the local First Nations. I speak to Sault Ste. Marie, because I am from Sault Ste. Marie, home of the Powley decision, that's the Supreme Court Powley Decision. They gave us a lot of our rights; they didn't give us our rights, I am sorry, we affirmed our rights under the Constitution. But it talks about the long standing heritage of the First Nations, so I find that a kind of a hit against the Métis. Because that is one of the historical, and we call ourselves, the Historical Sault Ste. Marie because the historical Métis community is in Sault Ste. Marie. I think that is a little bit of a slight to the Métis when we are not mentioned. And again, it talks about the First Nations Tribes and also it mentions the Sagamok and Massey and that is part of our area as well. I don't know what the procedure was where you went out like Sault Ste. Marie didn't engage in this and that area goes up right up to Dubreuville down to Massey and towards Sudbury and that is Sault Ste. Marie territory torterre. Those items do not speak very well towards representing the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Métis. Thank you.

Pauline Richardson, Region 7 Métis Council: Bonjour, um thank you for coming here today. My name is Pauline Richardson. I am from Georgian Bay. My ancestors were one of the first settlers of Penetanguishene and we have the Bouchards in our family. I guess my comment is that I see the priority of Georgian Bay, if we are going to save the quality of Georgian Bay Lakes, I don't want to be meeting for the sake of meeting that the Phragmites taking over the shorelines and um some of the industries killing some of our fish within our and having some of the , all the different components accumulative

effects on our lakes we are seeing firsthand that where we use to be able to get fish like my mother and her and my uncle use to say that they use to be able to drop a stone and pick up the fish, now we are at the point where our fishing is almost impossible to do and restocking those lakes isn't the solution if there is nowhere for them to grasp onto things. Not only the fish for us either, we have like the frogs and the turtles and some even some of the, what you guys would call weeds...and the levels of the lake ... and there was some studies done in our region when I was young some people were saying that we should actually be protecting our water and controlling the flow of the water, and there was a whole bunch of studies where the government paid for this gentleman to do these studies and it got shelved and it's dusty and people are bringing it back out and saying what were we saying back then, when you look at those kinds of reports those are very important factors because if we are not looking at what we did in the past, and they were meeting and I am sure they were not meeting for the sake of just meeting either, so I think that we need to actually, the priority and the lakes, the lakes are in trouble right now and that is the comment I want to make , it's not just the climate change, it's also the human changes on behaviour on the lakes and if we don't have any key and we are not actually doing anything on the lakes, and I went to France for the nuclear and I don't drink wine and I ended up with a bottle of water and it came from Owen Sound so I went to France and bought very expensive water mind you, and it's from Owen Sound, so these waters is being taken from our land because that really worries me because how are we controlling that water is not back in the system if it is over in France. So those kind of issues are the issues we bring forward as a Metis woman that you know that I want to make sure I want to make sure my grandchildren have the same opportunities and are as crazy as I was when I was a kid and that opportunity is not there right now. So those are the concerns I am bringing forward right now.