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GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY ADVISORY GROUPS RELEASE 1993 REPORTS TO INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION AND THE PUBLIC

In a coordinated release today, the Great Lakes advisory boards, councils and task forces of the **International Joint Commission** issued their assessments of and recommendations for Great Lakes water quality, as outlined in their 1993 reports to the Commission. Presentations on the reports also will be made at the Commission's **Biennial Meeting on Great Lakes Water Quality**, to be held October 22-24, 1993 in Windsor, Ontario. For further information about the meeting, contact Commission representatives listed above. Brief summaries of each report follow.

Virtual Elimination Task Force

To accomplish virtual elimination of persistent toxic substances from the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, as required in the U.S. - Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the **Virtual Elimination Task Force** concludes that a strategy must be adopted that anticipates and prevents future contamination of the ecosystem by persistent toxic substances, and applies treatment and remediation measures to intercept, capture and remove persistent contaminants already in the environment.

The task force's proposed strategy includes short- and long-term measures, including:

- Development of criteria and decisionmaking procedures by governments and citizens to evaluate persistent toxic substances and determine whether, how and when particular uses should be phased out;
- Employment of a use tree analysis to develop these criteria, which traces chemicals from their end uses and products to their origin;
- Immediate bans and phaseouts according to strict timetables for 11 Critical Pollutants, such as PCBs, DDT and its metabolites, dieldrin, toxaphene, mirex, mercury and others, developed according to established decisionmaking processes;
- Treatment and control as interim measures to intercept or capture persistent toxic substances once they are produced or used, but before they enter the ecosystem;
- Remediation of areas already contaminated using cost-effective technologies;
- Screening of potential new chemicals for potential harm before approving their production or use.

The task force's report examines each element of the strategy in detail, and includes additional recommendations for legislation, technology, economic instruments and consultation required to implement the strategy. An appendix, including supplementary reports to the task force that attempt to apply the strategy to PCBs, mercury and feedstock substances such as chlorine, was also published.

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Great Lakes Water Quality Board

In its 1993 report to the Commission, the **Great Lakes Water Quality Board** focuses on three areas: legislative and regulatory considerations for virtual elimination of persistent toxic substances; risk assessment; and scientific challenges from regulatory decisionmaking. The board concludes that "the injury caused by certain persistent toxic substances has been so extensive and the costs to society so high that immediate measures are warranted." The board also concludes that regulatory acts in both countries have become ineffective in virtually eliminating persistent toxic substances from the ecosystem, and specifically recommends that the Canada Environmental Protection Act and the United States Toxic Substances Control Act be strengthened.

The board also recommends that joint fish advisories be developed by the Great Lakes states and provinces to ensure that uniform information is conveyed to the public, and that greater coordinated discussion, through Commission-sponsored workshops, be held to address the effects of toxic substances which mimic hormones and impact embryo development.

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Great Lakes Science Advisory Board

The **Great Lakes Science Advisory Board**, in its 1993 report, recommends development of a binational strategy to reduce toxic substances loadings to the Great Lakes based on timetables and targets. The strategy should also be supported by an information management system to allow regular assessment of progress.

Based on examination of emerging issues, the board concludes that the complex and difficult issue of setting policy in the face of scientific uncertainty should be assessed by the Commission with the support of the governments. The board recommends that the issue of a chlorine sunset be used as a case study in this assessment.

The board also recommends that a long-term binational commitment to climate change research be included in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and that wider use be made of predictive models for Remedial Action Plans to increase confidence in the remediation process.

The board examines ecosystem health from the perspective of scientists and the general public in communities concerned with health and the adverse effects of polluting substances. Further development of indicators of human and ecosystem health is recommended, along with further definition and use of the "weight of evidence" approach in decisionmaking.

Finally, the board recommends that opportunities to improve environment and economy linkages be identified through a binational review of emerging international trade agreements relative to the goals of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

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Council of Great Lakes Research Managers

The **Council of Great Lakes Research Managers** recommends, in its 1993 report, that the impact of aquatic nonindigenous nuisance species in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin be studied on an emergency basis, with initial emphasis on zebra mussels in the Lake Erie ecosystem.

"The overwhelming colonization of Lake Erie by zebra mussels has altered the pathways of nutrient and energy flow," according to the council. Dramatic impacts include an 80 percent decrease in diatoms in the western lake basin, a drastic decline in chlorophyll concentrations to 1 microgram/litre or less, and a 400-600 percent increase in transparency. Adult fish stocks do not appear to be presently affected, but the council expects that the major changes in food supply will likely affect the fishery.

The report also proposes that Lake Erie serve as a case study for implementing the framework developed by the council to coordinate Great Lakes research priorities using an ecosystem approach. The framework integrates scientific inquiry with policy development to make the best use of human and financial resources in the Great Lakes research institutions.

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Great Lakes Educators Advisory Council

Throughout the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence region, individuals and organizations have initiated effective environmental education programs to increase awareness of and commitment to resolving issues facing the basin. While these initiatives lay a useful foundation to ensure broad awareness in the region, additional efforts are required to provide a comprehensive framework for community-based learning.

Additional initiatives required, according to the council, include mandates or specific goals for Great Lakes and environmental education in state and provincial educational curricula guidelines for all grade levels and subject areas; college and university courses to ensure environmental literacy in all graduating students; a "Great Lakes Watch" television program for local news programs; a "Project Great Lakes" curriculum; and continuation of week-long institutes and teacher training workshops initially created by the council.

The council also recommends that a clearinghouse be created for Great Lakes - St. Lawrence environmental education, to provide valuable information and networking for educators and citizens throughout the region.

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