



THE BALLAST WATER COLLABORATIVE

Setting tangible goals and deadlines for progress

Last September, the International Joint Commission and the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation hosted a gathering in Detroit that turned out to be a notable milestone in the history of the Great Lakes Saint Lawrence Seaway System (GLSLS). The purpose of the Great Lakes Regulatory Forum on Ballast Water was to assemble a comprehensive cross-section of stakeholders interested in the issues of ballast water treatment and aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Attending the meeting were representatives of six of the eight Great Lakes states' environmental regulatory authorities, as well as a number of U.S. governmental agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). In addition, representatives from the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, as well as Transport Canada and the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation were in attendance. Significantly, both the Canadian and U.S. shipping industries were well represented.

The meeting provided a forum for candid discussion surrounding the challenges of ballast water management, both operational and regulatory, in the shared goal of halting the ship-mediated spread of AIS in the Great Lakes. It allowed for direct communication between key stakeholders to share basic knowledge and to explore possible voluntary collaboration options, regardless of the current regulatory processes underway. The participation of so many key individuals in this dialogue and the willingness to exchange pertinent information contributed to the forum's success.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the meeting was the presentations made by the panel of scientists assembled by Dr. David Reid of NOAA. Without question, it was the most prestigious gathering of scientific talent ever assembled to discuss AIS problems in the Great Lakes. The panel includ-

ed Dr. Sarah Bailey (Fisheries and Oceans Canada), Allegra Cangelosi (Northeast-Midwest Institute), Dr. Richard Everett (USCG), Dr. Hugh MacIsaac (Director, Canadian Aquatic Invasive Species Network), Scott Smith (USGS) and Chris Wiley (Transport Canada, Fisheries and Oceans). Among the very intriguing "takeaways" from this panel were the following:

- Given the implementation of ballast tank flushing and ballast water exchange mandated for all ocean going vessels entering the Seaway, coupled with the joint

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inspection process in Montreal, the science panel unanimously concluded that the current risk of future introduction of AIS into the GLSLS by ballast water of transoceanic ships is "very low."

- Since 2006, the year the enhanced ballast water regulations were implemented, there have been no new reported introductions of AIS into the system.

- If only high-risk freshwater species are considered, the discharge of transoceanic ballast water under current joint Seaway regulations appears, on average, to be meeting or exceeding the IMO D2 discharge standard.

The state regulators indicated their desire to work with the shipping industry on a ballast water treatment proposal to be funded under the newly enacted Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The non-federal members of the group (now officially named the Ballast Water Collaborative) are advancing a proposal in the near term to secure funding to conduct an AIS risk assessment on the Great Lakes, determine

the applicability of existing ballast water treatment technologies in freshwater and, ultimately, implement shipboard treatment systems to reduce the risk of AIS spread in the Great Lakes.

A second meeting of the Ballast Water Collaborative was held in Ann Arbor in December, at which direct communication on complex technical and environmental challenges associated with the AIS problem continued. There was a consensus that uniform ballast water management regulations providing sound environmental protection will also provide the clear direction desired by the shipping industry. The group also reaffirmed its commitment to identifying near-term voluntary ballast water treatment projects to reduce risks associated with ships' ballast water discharges. The research needs enunciated by the group were shared with the Great Lakes Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel meeting. This resulted in some of the research priorities of the ANS panel being modified as well as two new priorities being added to the list.

In early January, a third session brought the group together for further discussion on how the Ballast Water Collaborative effort will complement, not compete with, existing efforts to find, support and implement effective AIS risk-mitigation measures in the immediate and longer term. The group is focused on setting tangible goals and deadlines to achieve progress.

It will take the continued commitment of all the stakeholders to keep this effort moving forward. The AIS issue is critical for the entire Great Lakes community and, as long as we think and act as a community, rather than as individuals with our own vested interests, I believe this group will be a productive force in achieving tangible results. ■

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