

Summary of International Joint Commission advice to the Governments on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement review

by Great Lakes United

General

- Concise, surprisingly strong; a must-read for thinking about revision of the Agreement
- No assessment of the IJC advice by environmental groups at this time
- After its 2005 public hearings on the prospective Agreement review, the IJC is a participant in the review process like everybody else, though perhaps the most influential
- Those interested in publicly commenting on the IJC advice should direct it to the governments, who are ongoingly considering it, no longer to the IJC

Regarding Agreement content

- The Agreement should retain its focus on water quality
- The governments should replace—rather than revise—the Agreement with a shorter, more action-oriented document
- Question for the IJC: is it implying that specific commitments should be left out of the Agreement?
- The Agreement add or augment commitments on:
 - Emerging chemicals of concern
 - Control and prevent introduction of invasive species
 - Restoration and preservation of “hydrological processes”
 - Preventing groundwater pollution
 - Protection, creation and restoration of habitat
 - Adaptation to climate change
 - Monitoring “atmospheric sources of pollution”
 - Reducing the impact of shoreline development and urban sprawl
 - Improving the “condition of nearshore waters”
- Arguably some items in the above list contradict the recommendation to focus on water quality
- The governments should require development of a Binational Action Plan, reported on and updated every three years
- The governments should identify means of accountability (this was the sole subject of the IJC’s thirteenth biennial report on the Agreement, released in February 2007)
- The Agreement should specify that watersheds be the geographic units that are used to implement programs
- Human health should be part of the Agreement’s goals and objectives

Regarding Agreement implementation

- Signing should be by the heads of state and endorsed by Parliament and Congress
- The Agreement should establish a binational “political-level” steering committee of the heads of agencies
- The Agreement should also provide for a subordinate “coordinating committee” of senior responsible officials
- The coordinating committee should include state, provincial, municipal officials, and representatives of Tribes and First Nations, designated to act for their respective organizations in “signing operational agreements.”
- The Agreement should designate the IJC to write a triennial report assessing progress that includes:
 - A synthesis of the public’s views
 - The commission’s independent assessment and advice
- The Agreement should continue to mandate that the commission issue special reports at any time on emerging and evolving issues or on any other matters related to Agreement objectives