



**Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO**

**THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE**

**On Affordable Dredging**

**Before the New York City Waterfront Committee**

*Thursday, October 27, 2008*

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of over 350 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, transit and education.

As the Intrepid was slowly brought to its berth a few weeks ago, we welcomed back a great cultural institution, but were also reminded of one of the most pressing problems facing the continued revitalization of our waterfront. Two years ago when the boat was to be moved for necessary repairs in full view of the assembled dignitaries and press it would not budge. The great aircraft carrier was literally stuck in the mud. Quick federal action at the highest levels got the money and expertise necessary to dig the big boat out of the muck and her path

toward refurbishment was smoothed.

Unfortunately that is not true for too many other boats and waterways in our City. The Tall Ships that have often graced New York Harbor could not return as too many of the piers where they once berthed have now silted up. Many small businesses feel the pain of the impossible cost of dredging. An example is Schildwachter Oil in the Bronx, located on Westchester Creek. This oil company must now use half filled oil barges to transport oil up what was supposed to be a Navigable Waterway because the creek is now too shallow for a fully loaded barge. The accretion of mud affects education and recreation on the waterfront as well as business. The Science Barge, the fishing boats out of the Sheepshead bay, local marinas, to name a few, have a harder time operating as the silt piles up around our harbor and waterways. We are drowning in our own mud.

Dredging is not a new problem in the Metropolitan area, but it is one that needs new solutions. The cost of dredging has skyrocketed in recent years from less than \$10 per cubic yard to over \$100. In our region just the maintenance dredging alone is about 1 million cubic yards each year, so we are talking about millions and millions of dollars. The price of testing the silt for toxic pollutants has risen substantially as well. While this is a problem for everyone, the people feeling it most are the little guys on the waterfront. Maintenance dredging is paid for by carriers through a trust fund and capital improvement projects such as harbor deepening are paid for by taxpayers and the Port Authority. But what about the local maritime businesses, parks, and marinas? The structure we have in place

now forces them to pay their own way if they need dredging done and the costs are now often prohibitive.

We need to work together to find solutions for them and solutions for this broken system. There needs to be a way for everyone to equitably bear the cost. This is a great waterfront priority and demands the immediate attention of the State of New York, the City of New York, the Port Authority and the federal government.

It should be noted that last month, a Regional Sediment Management Work Group released a draft report. This work group was most remarkable because it included a wide variety of agencies – from NYC EDC to the State of New Jersey to the Port Authority and Army Corps of Engineers, as well as Advocacy Groups such as Clean Ocean Action and NY-NJ Baykeeper. This report stated that up to \$25 million dollars per year could be saved if our harbor and waterways were not so polluted with industrial contamination such as PCBs from up the Hudson and Dioxin from the Passaic. The upriver polluting corporations, who have done such substantial harm to the environment, have also substantially increased the cost of dredging and they should be held responsible and made to pay their fair share.

Lastly, more needs to be done finding places to put dredged material – or better yet finding ways to reuse it. Possible solutions might include greater habitat restoration to help make the Army Corps' new restoration plan happen or

containment islands, if necessary – given the huge volume and expense of dredge material as well as rock and silt being generated by the other mega projects in the region such as East Side Access, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave Subway, and DEP’s water tunnel work. These ideas and other must be fairly put on the table as we all must work together to address the rising tide of mud that threaten the vitality and revitalization of our waterfront.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.