



Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance

Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO
on Invasive Species in the New York/ New Jersey Harbor

Before the Committee on Waterfronts
December 18, 2009

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance. The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance is a coalition of over 380 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

New York City grocery stores, seafood markets, pet stores, nurseries and lumberyards are brimming with imported goods coming through the local port and marinas. Globalization and innovations in transportation have facilitated the movement of goods and people to an unprecedented scale, but these gains in international commerce have had an unintended consequence: the invasion of non-native species.

Aquatic invasive species are one of the most significant threats to our water resources as well as our local and regional economies. The cost to the United States' GDP alone is estimated to be more than \$100 billion per year. The cost to the NY/NJ harbor ecosystem and its fisheries, including the cost of eliminating invasive species are substantial and growing. Prevention is a necessary part of any long-term sustainable economic and environmental strategy.

In many areas the invasion rate of foreign aquatic species can be directly linked with shipping traffic. Since 1959, when the St. Lawrence Seaway opened the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes to direct ocean-going shipping, 65% of the more than 180 non-native species discovered have been attributed to ballast water release. Scientists have shown that the invasion rate of these species is directly correlated with shipping activity.

Zebra mussels were introduced to the Hudson River in ship ballast water during the 1980's. Their filtering activity reduces the abundance of both phytoplankton and zooplankton in the water column, and their spread has been linked to native mussel loss and fish population changes.

Prior to the introduction of water chestnut in the 1800s, there were no large populations of floating-leaved plants on the Hudson River. This invasive species is now the second most abundant aquatic plant in freshwater tidal areas and is responsible for the reduction in dissolved oxygen. Current research is exploring the impact of invasive species, such as the impact that plant beds have on nutrient cycling and green house gas release, as well as other impacts in the NY/NJ Harbor.

Another invasive species, the Chinese mitten crab from East Asia, was first discovered in the Hudson in 2007. Again, these crabs were most likely introduced through ship ballast water or live release. They are aggressive and may compete with the native blue crab in

the Hudson River. Their burrowing habits may threaten stream bank and earthen dam stability and promote erosion and habitat loss.

Most recently the Snakehead fish, a species native to Asia, was found in the Meadow Lake in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens. The 28-inch voracious predator is a major threat to the region's food chain.

Even though the comment deadline passed on December 4th, 2009, I wanted to bring it to your attention that the United States Coast Guard proposed a new rule, "Standards for Living Organisms in Ships' Ballast Water Discharged into U.S. Waters" (Docket #: USCG-2001-10486), that would require ships transiting any waters of the United States to clean-up their ballast tanks. This rule would be a groundbreaking regulation and could be the strongest effort yet in the fight to stop the invasion of non-native aquatic species.

The U.S. Coast Guard's proposed rule is much stronger than the International Maritime Organization standard and matches the strongest standards in the United States set by California and New York. The New York State Invasive Species Council Act is a leading example of what can be done at the state level to identify and coordinate actions to prevent, control, and manage invasive species.

While overall we are pleased with the strong, final standard proposed in this Coast Guard rulemaking, we are disappointed with the timeline put forth. The proposed rule allows polluters too much time to fix the problem. Ships could avoid compliance for another ten

years unless timelines are shortened. Since the technology is currently available, we urge the U.S. Coast Guard to set a firm final compliance date of no later than January 1, 2016.

We are pleased that vessels subject to this ruling are also subject to the Environmental Protection Agency's Vessel General Permit. EPA has the responsibility under the Clean Water Act to regulate ballast water discharges to protect water quality. The Coast Guard and EPA need to work together to create a coherent federal and local program for regulating ballast water that utilizes both the Coast Guard's expertise in vessels and EPA's expertise in protecting water quality. I hope the City Council will support this rule and the exemplary state programs. Notably, NY Seagrant's Protect Your Waters Program (<http://www.protectyourwaters.net/>) and the New York Invasive Species Clearinghouse (<http://nyis.info/>) as well as DEC's (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/50121.html>) education materials for boat launches, fishing piers and fish cleaning stations to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive aquatic species.

Finally, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance recommends the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program include invasive species as a management area in the program's Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan as a way of ensuring more research on and strategies for managing invasive species can be applied to the harbor.

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

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