

**LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE  
POSITION STATEMENT**

**On**

***Lower Trophic Level Changes and Their Implications to Fish Community Composition and Productivity in Lake Erie***

The Lake Erie Committee is committed to ensuring that the management of the very important fisheries of Lake Erie has been grounded in the best available science and information. The five jurisdictions along the lake have worked together in a highly successful and cooperative manner to ensure that the critical fisheries data series are maintained, and that the expertise in fisheries science is available.

The recent major changes occurring within the ecosystem of Lake Erie have major influence on the fish communities of the lake, and on the people who derive a living or enjoyment from them. Many of the changes underway appear to be driven by changes at the lower trophic levels of the ecosystem that have profound influence on both the composition and productivity of the fish communities within the lake. The collection of important scientific information at the lower trophic levels is an area beyond the immediate influence and expertise of the fisheries management agencies. However, as we attempt to understand the driving forces behind the changes in the lake, we find that very important data and knowledge at the lower trophic levels of the ecosystem is missing. The Committee feels that it is critical to come to a common scientific understanding of the causes of these changes in Lake Erie, and of their highly significant implications to fish community composition and productivity.

The Lake Erie Committee has been active in developing and adopting position statements on current issues and on issues the Committee believes will be important in the future. Most recently the LEC released a position statement on phosphorus management in Lake Erie, followed by a press release in February. The committee registered concern over the implications of further changes in phosphorus loadings to the lake until we come to a scientific understanding of how such changes will influence the composition and productivity of fish communities within the lake. The committee stands behind this statement and further wishes to make the point that phosphorus is a critical element in all freshwater ecosystems. Phosphorus is an essential nutrient, and finding the right balance is the important issue.

Phosphorus is only one influence at the lower trophic levels that needs to be examined as we attempt to understand the implications of the ecosystem change on Lake Erie fish communities. The Committee has called for immediate research concerning the changes within the ecosystem. Because of the complexity of the issue, this will require cooperation and collaboration among jurisdictions, agencies and Universities.

The five fishery management agencies represented on the Lake Erie Committee are very interested in supporting research initiatives that will improve our understanding of the changes within the Lake Erie ecosystem, and of their implications to fish community composition and productivity. All five agencies are prepared to assist such research by providing vessel time,

facilities and staff for projects the LEC considers high priority in developing this scientific understanding and an ecosystem management approach for Lake Erie.

In the near future, the LEC intends to issue a clear statement of its priority research needs, and of the knowledge gaps that must be filled in order advance fishery management on Lake Erie. The five management agencies (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation) are committed to working with the various research institutions and other agencies to complete the necessary research. In the longer term, the five agencies wish to find means of ensuring that important data at all trophic levels are collected, and that the data series are maintained.

This is a major commitment on behalf of the agencies and we urge scientists and other agencies to take advantage of it.

**Adopted:**

Annual Lake Erie Committee Meeting

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Niagara Falls, ON