

Resolution

Submitted by National Wildlife Federation & Canadian Environmental Law Association  
Approved by Great Lakes United Annual Meeting - 6/1/97

Renegotiation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

WHEREAS, over 20 million people drink Great Lakes water, and one-fifth of the United States population and three-fifths of the Canadian population live in the Great Lakes region; and

WHEREAS, all inhabitants of the Great Lakes region people and wildlife have a right to clean water and safe food; and

WHEREAS, 450 priority organic and heavy metalcontaminants have been identified in the Great Lakes ecosystem, many of which threaten the health of the ecosystem; and

WHEREAS, toxic discharges, pollutants leaking from sediments and landfills, and atmospheric emissions deposited in the Great Lakes continue to threaten the health of the people, fish, and wildlife of this region. These pollutants can cause cancer and birth defects, hurt our immune system, reduce sperm counts and damage intellectual potential in children; and

WHEREAS, these hidden toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes environment prevent us from being able to fully attain our right to clean water and safe food; and

WHEREAS, the people of the Great Lakes region, and their elected and appointed government officials from Canada, the United States, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York share the responsibility for ending the pollution and the risk to our families and future generations; and

WHEREAS, the 1978 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (and the amendments to it in the 1987 "Protocol") includes a compelling vision for rehabilitating and protecting Great Lakes water quality, as well as numerous general objectives and specific obligations for fulfilling this vision; and

WHEREAS, when the Agreement was last amended in 1987, numerous specific obligations were made by the U.S. and Canada, mostly in the Annexes to the Agreement. Many of the most important obligations of the Agreement have not been fulfilled, including those to:

- \* develop and implement regulatory strategies to reduce and eliminate inputs of persistent toxics substances through a philosophy of zero discharge;

- \* develop and implement measures to control atmospheric deposition of toxic pollutants contaminating the Lakes;
- \* develop action levels that protect the health of Great Lakes inhabitants from exposures to mixtures of toxic chemicals from a multitude of sources;
- \* develop and implement clean-up plans for Areas of Concern and Lake-wide Management Plans;
- \* develop and implement watershed management plans to control polluted runoff from urban and rural lands, and
- \* develop compatible criteria to classify and guide the clean-up of contaminated sediments; and

WHEREAS, in the last few years there has been an erosion of government support for some Great Lakes programs designed to control toxic pollutants. For example, in the U.S., attempts have been made by Congress to weaken key provisions of the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act. In Canada, financial support for Great Lakes programs has been drastically cut; and

WHEREAS, a trend in both countries has been away from enforceable standards and regulatory programs in favor of voluntary approaches to address toxic pollution problems. While voluntary approaches are appropriate in some applications, they must be buttressed by strong and enforceable government regulations and standards, as required by both the Agreement and domestic laws in the two countries; and

WHEREAS, the Agreement provides that following every third biennial report of the International Joint Commission, the U.S. and Canada shall conduct a review of the operation and effectiveness of this Agreement. This review triggers consideration by the U.S. and Canada of whether to amend the Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the participants at the Great Lakes United annual meeting in Bolton, Ontario, May 30-June 1, 1997, urge the governments of Canada and the United States not to open the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement for re-negotiation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Great Lakes United urges the governments to redouble their focus on and commitment to implementing the specific commitments made in the 1978 Agreement and the 1987 amendments in order to fulfill the vision of the Agreement for a clean and healthy Great Lakes ecosystem. Great Lakes United especially urges governments to focus their energies and attention on those commitments in the Agreement to reduce and eliminate persistent toxic pollution through zero discharge, in order to end the toxic pollution that threatens our health.