High Water-Protecting St. Lawrence Seaway Trade and Transportation

In the past few years, Lake Ontario and other lakes in the Great Lakes basin have experienced extremely high water levels and flooding on the shorelines of the lakes and the St. Lawrence River. Across the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region, commercial navigation depends on water levels that are high enough to allow for the carriage of cargo but low enough so that unsafe, fast-moving currents do not stop navigation traffic.

Our Position

- High water levels are negatively impacting residents and businesses, including the marine shipping sector that transports cargo through the St. Lawrence Seaway. In 2019, marine shipping worked diligently with stakeholders for a solution to ensure safe navigation at record outflow levels for five months to help lower Lake Ontario, taking on 26 mitigation measures that caused shipping delays, lost cargo business and millions of dollars of extra operating costs. The business revenue losses of transit delays to the wider Canadian and U.S. economies totalled approximately $2 million per day.
- Moving forward, the marine sector will continue to work with stakeholders to find solutions. However, marine shipping opposes any Lake Ontario outflow levels at Moses-Saunders dam that would result in stop-and-go navigation, weekly closures or shortening the shipping season.
- **The economic impact of closing the St. Lawrence Seaway for even one week would cost the U.S. and Canadian economies an average of $193 million USD ($250 million CAD) –** impacting farmers' grain exports, manufacturing plant operations and disrupting deliveries of fuel, construction materials and road salt for winter safety.
- Marine commerce throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway region supports 238,000 well-paying, direct and indirect jobs, including longshoremen, terminal employees, vessel operators, pilots and local truck drivers. Disruption to the supply chain would result in the loss of jobs at the state and provincial level.
- The marine mode is the most carbon-efficient way to transport goods and a growing part of the environmental solution for climate change and the decongestion of busy roads and railway corridors, where products would otherwise have to move in less safe conditions.

Calls for Action

1 That the St. Lawrence Seaway shipping season begin in mid-March.

2 That the IJC use scientific data to measure the benefit to shorelines of any proposed actions and that these benefits be balanced against any harm to the U.S. and Canadian economies.

3 We request a full risk assessment process take place to determine if it is possible to raise outflows beyond the L/gradient limits and maintain safe navigation at the same time.

4 We request the inclusion of commercial navigation interests as members of the International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board, as recent appointees have been made that represent riparian interests.

5 We call for investments in marine infrastructure such as increased technology to better inform commercial navigation when outflows are high and currents are fast, including current meters, shoal mapping and other tools.

6 We believe the LOSLRB should explore options for increasing outflows during the period when commercial navigation is not operating, and should explore what other measures could be taken that allow increased outflows depending on ice cover in the winter season.

7 We recommend studying the opportunities for relief to commercial navigation when outflows are at or approaching maximum to compensate for the delays in transit due to high water, such as potential to increase ship draft.

8 Finally, because the scope of this problem is beyond just Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, we call on the IJC and governments (federal, state and provincial) to recognize shoreline resiliency as the path forward to address stakeholder needs into the future.