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International Joint Commission
Secretary, U.S. Section
2000 L Street, NW, Suite #615
Washington, DC 20440

Re: Lake Ontario Water Level Management "Plan 2014"

Dear IJC Commissioners:

We are writing to express our concern and anger about the new "Plan 2014" which has been proposed by the International Joint Commission (IJC) to manage the water levels of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence Seaway. This plan is just a remake of Plan Bv7 which had already drawn the ire of lakefront homeowners, businesses, and municipalities. If this plan is adopted, the potential damage to shoreline properties, businesses, waterfront parks and historic sites, and public infrastructure would increase dramatically, since Plan 2014 will allow higher water levels in the spring and lower water levels in the fall and winter.

The methodology that was utilized to develop this plan is flawed. For example, the conclusions drawn by the IJC working groups are based on data that is outdated and inaccurate. Property values are much higher now than the figures upon which the damage estimates are based, and some properties were ignored altogether. The public meetings held by the IJC to hear the concerns of stakeholders were scheduled in such a way that most homeowners would not be able to attend, either in remote locations or during daytime hours when most homeowners are working. We believe that this was done purposely to minimize the public outcry against this plan.

We purchased our waterfront home in the Town of Greece, New York nearly thirty years ago with the understanding that Lake Ontario water levels would continue to be managed within the targeted range established by both the U.S. and Canadian governments many years ago. When the Moses-Saunders Dam and St. Lawrence Seaway project was constructed in the 1950's, one of its primary purposes was to control water levels in Lake Ontario to significantly reduce the flooding conditions that had previously occurred. To the extent possible, this has been successful. After paying a premium to own a water front home, we have since spent well over \$200,000 in improvements on our property over the years, based on our expectation that the lake levels would continue to be managed as in the past. We obviously are not alone – hundreds, if not thousands of homeowners and businesses have spent millions, if not billions of dollars on water front improvements.

It is unconscionable that the IJC would now consider changing previous agreements on water levels and thus place our properties in peril of significant erosion and property loss. It appears to us that a few environmentalist extremists have been able to convince the IJC through their lobbying efforts to seriously consider this new plan. By its own study, the IJC admits that there will be millions of dollars in additional damages sustained by water front homes and businesses under Plan 2014. We are convinced that these estimates (approximately \$3 million annual average) are substantially underestimated, especially in years where there is above average run off in the spring caused by above average snowfalls in the winter or a rainy spring. In the past, even with the existing water level management plan, many lakefront homes and businesses have experienced some property damage during such years. If Plan 2014 is approved, this damage will increase significantly. Most water front homes have basements. Higher water levels result in more water infiltration into basements, causing basement flooding and mold formation.

We are not only water front homeowners – we are also boating enthusiasts. We, as have just about every other water front homeowner, have invested additional tens of thousands of dollars in boats, docks, and other boating equipment. There are dozens of marinas, water front restaurants, and other businesses that have invested millions in docking facilities which will be in jeopardy if Plan 2014 plan is adopted. In addition, our already short boating season will be shortened further if Plan 2014 is adopted, since there will not be enough water in late summer to navigate many of the lake's tributaries and there will be too much water in the spring to navigate under many bridges. Docks will be under water or water levels will be too low to be utilized, thus causing financial harm to those businesses that rely on boaters for their livelihood.

What are the supposed benefits of Plan 2014? Environmentalists apparently believe that it will be beneficial to coastal wetlands, blaming the current status of coastal wetlands on artificially controlled water levels. There are many factors affecting wetlands, not just water levels. Climate change, pollution, invasive species, fertilizer and pesticide runoff, and the

natural evolution of the wetlands are all factors that are not addressed in Plan 2014. Wetlands experts have stated that the science of wetlands is still in its infancy, with little historic background available on wetlands restoration, because it is an incredibly complex and lengthy process. Some wetlands are difficult or impossible to restore. The idea that merely changing water level management practices by the IJC will magically transform coastal wetlands back to some ideal condition envisioned by environmentalists is merely theory. Plan 2014 is therefore an experiment on a huge scale. Considering the resulting damages and costs that Plan 2014 will create, an experiment of this magnitude is totally irresponsible.

The environmentalists have often cited Buck Pond, located in the Town of Greece, as an example of the problems created by the current water level management plan. They say that the pond is being taken over by cattails and that the fish population, including northern pike, has decreased significantly over the past several years. Supposedly, higher and lower lake levels periodically would solve this problem. That assessment is incorrect. Buck Pond is indeed being taken over by plant life, not so much by cattails but instead by the invasive species Eurasian phragmites australis and Eurasian milfoil. One of the consequences of these plants taking over the pond is a significant decrease in suitable spawning sites for fish, thus reducing fish populations. Gobies, an invasive fish species, also feed on fish eggs and the young of northern pike and other fish. In addition, as we write this letter, Buck Pond is completely blocked off from Lake Ontario, due to sand taking over the mouth of the outlet - this at a time when Lake Ontario is at or near its peak water level for the year. This occurs every year. Therefore, if the pond has no way to drain into Lake Ontario for much of the year, how would lower water levels ever impact the pond and wetland ecology as Plan 2014 suggests? Plan 2014 will not help this problem! We are sure that similar situations exist in many of the other coastal wetlands.

As mentioned, the primary problem in Buck Pond is a result of invasive species. What brought hundreds of environmentally destructive invasive species (such as zebra mussels, quagga mussels, sea lamprey, gobies, alewife, fish diseases, etc.) into Lake Ontario and its tributaries? Shipping, through the release of ballast water in our waterways, is a primary cause. Invasive species have seriously damaged recreational and commercial fisheries, increased costs for natural resource management, severely impacted businesses dependent on recreation, clogged water intake systems, and fundamentally altered the food webs in most of the Great Lakes. This has been a known problem for decades, but with the exception of some half hearted efforts to control ballast water release, it continues to be a threat to the ecology of our lakes and tributaries. It seems to us that the environmentalists and the IJC should be concentrating their efforts on this more pressing problem, including keeping Asian carp out of the Great Lakes, instead of campaigning for Plan 2014. It is incredulous to us that Plan 2014 is actually designed to help shipping interests, one of the biggest causes of environmental damage on the face of the Earth.

There are also other ways to deal with the issues that environmentalists continue to raise about wetlands. Cattail populations can be managed by harvesting them, perhaps as a local source of bio-fuel. The NYSDEC could discontinue or adjust its cattail protection policy if cattails are so bad. If there is concern about muskrat populations, why are there no limits on the number of muskrats one can kill in season? Adjust the policy. To increase the population of pike and other fish, adjust the fishing seasons for affected species and/or reduce the per day catch limit. Most of these common sense solutions would not cost anything and millions of dollars in property damage could be avoided.

We have experienced plenty of wildlife growth over the decades that we have lived on Lake Ontario and the Long Pond channel, with species now prevalent in our neighborhoods that previously were not present, such as swans, otters, beavers, mink, new fish species, etc. The current water level management plan is therefore already working to the benefit of wildlife.

We urge you to abandon Plan 2014 and to continue the current water level management plan.

Sincerely,

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