

PRESS RELEASE



COMMUNIQUE

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

CANADA

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

NO. 14

TO BE RELEASED AT 12:00
NOON, FEBRUARY 25, 1969

**INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION
REPORT ON POLLUTION OF
ST. MARYS, ST. CLAIR AND DETROIT RIVERS**

The Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, today released a report by the International Joint Commission on its recent public international meetings held to inquire into pollution of the St. Marys, St. Clair and Detroit Rivers. The report, which was also forwarded to the United States Government, is contained in the following letter dated January 31, 1969 addressed to Mr. Sharp by Mr. A.D.P. Heeney, Chairman of the Canadian Section of the International Joint Commission. The report is also being released today in Washington.

"Last week the Commission conducted two public international meetings on pollution in the Connecting Channels of the Great Lakes, concerning which it maintains continuing supervision as authorized in 1951 by the Governments of Canada and the United States. The first meeting was held on January 21st at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, in relation to the St. Marys River; the second on January 22nd at Windsor, Ontario, with respect to the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers.

Both meetings were very well attended, not only by federal, provincial, state and municipal officials but also by representatives of industry and the public at large. Each meeting occupied a full day and a great deal of testimony was given and a great many briefs filed by public authorities and private persons. You may have noticed, too, that a good deal of attention was paid to these proceedings by the newspapers, television and radio.

These most recent meetings were similar to those held last year on the Niagara River and on the St. Croix River. The purposes were also the same, namely, to bring clearly into the open the current state of pollution, to ascertain why the water quality objectives recommended by the Commission and approved by the Governments concerned were not being met, and to have provincial, state and federal authorities having responsibility set forth categorically their current programmes for meeting these objectives.

We believe that it is important that the two Governments be informed without delay of the Commission's appreciation of the current condition of these rivers based upon the latest information made available at these meetings:

- (1) The situation in the St. Marys River continues to be unsatisfactory because of the discharge of waste materials (particularly oils, phenols, wood chips and iron) from two large Canadian industries, namely, the Algoma Steel Corporation Limited and Abitibi Paper Company Limited. However, both companies, for the first time, have submitted specific programmes of corrective action which, with other measures already taken by the border municipalities, give good prospects for bringing the river into conformity with the IJC objectives in the next year or so, provided the programmes are carried out in accordance with the companies' expressed intentions.
- (2) Although considerable improvements have been made in the St. Clair River, the position in the area of Sarnia, Ontario, continues to cause concern. Of the eleven major industries on the Canadian side discharging wastewaters to the river, the effluents from five comply with the objectives of the Ontario Water Resources Commission. The remaining six industries have abatement programmes underway or plans under discussion with the OWRC to achieve the same result. The OWRC believes that within the next year or two the Canadian industries responsible for the continuing pollution will be in compliance with the IJC objectives.

- (3) The Detroit River remains the chief problem in the Connecting Channels, mainly because of the heavy concentration of population and industry and consequently of pollutants on the United States side. However, many of the industrial establishments concerned are now in compliance with the effluent standards established by the Michigan Water Resources Commission. Others have completed installation of the abatement facilities required but are encountering operational problems in meeting these standards. These and the remaining industries are in discussion with the MWRC regarding additional measures and programmes necessary for compliance. The MWRC testified that it expected substantial improvement in 1969 and conformity with the IJC water quality objectives by November, 1970. The Municipal situation on the United States side also has necessitated large and costly programmes of development which, on the basis of the MWRC evidence, should so reduce pollution flowing from the Detroit and Wayne County sewerage systems that the IJC objectives will be met by November, 1970.

While the volume of municipal sewage discharged to the Detroit River on the Canadian side is a great deal less than on the U.S. side, much of it at present is untreated. This situation will be corrected with the completion this summer of Windsor's primary treatment plant and trunk sewers. Expansion of the treatment facilities and a higher degree of treatment are now under consideration with the OWRC. Of the industrial establishments discharging wastes on the Canadian side of the river, all but two are in essential compliance with the OWRC effluent objectives or are actively pursuing approved programmes to achieve compliance. The two plants whose programmes are not presently satisfactory are in discussion with OWRC officials.

The Commission has taken some encouragement from these meetings. They have served to concentrate public attention upon the facts of the situation and upon the programmes of the authorities for dealing with them. We believe also that these meetings have had the effect of strengthening the hands of those responsible for abatement control and enforcement and that they have stimulated and directed public opinion of both countries in constructive support of such endeavours.

Nevertheless, as you will note from this report, continued progress toward our objectives depends upon engagements as yet unfulfilled. In this connection, these public meetings provided an opportunity for the Commission, emphasizing the international aspects of the problem, to make it clear to all concerned that it was and is the intention of the IJC to exercise close supervision over remedial programmes, and to bring promptly to the attention of governments, federal and local, with appropriate recommendations, any conduct likely to impede or prevent the early attainment of the water quality objectives determined for these rivers.

We will be writing you further as soon as we have had an opportunity of examining the transcript of the voluminous evidence submitted and the many briefs received.

My colleague, the Chairman of the United States Section of the Commission, is sending a letter similar to this to the Secretary of State of the United States."