

**LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE**  
**POSITION STATEMENT**

**On**

*Structuring Native Fish Communities in the Twenty-first Century*

The Lake Erie Committee (LEC) has recently finalized its Lake Erie fish community goal stating, in part, “To secure a balanced, largely coolwater fish community, based upon a foundation of self-sustaining indigenous and naturalized species that occupies diverse habitats, provides valuable fisheries and reflects a healthy Lake Erie ecosystem.” The LEC has acknowledged the myriad of ecosystem disturbances over the past 165 years, including the reversal of nutrient enrichment during the past 30 years, which have resulted in the disparity between the current fish community and the goal.

The LEC’s concern over the rapid reversal of nutrient enrichment resulted in the issuance, in March 1998, of a position statement concerning lower trophic level changes and their implications to fish community composition and productivity in Lake Erie, and an “interim” position statement on phosphorus management in Lake Erie. The recent changes in trophic status, coupled with introductions of nonindigenous species, may be causing a shift in the lake’s energy flow from the pelagic zone to the benthic zone. In response, some native fish species, most notably whitefish and burbot, have experienced dramatic population increases. There has also been an obvious increase in abundance of small lake sturgeon and these fish community changes are creating much discussion within management agencies and among the publics for restoration of additional native fish species.

The LEC recognizes that reintroduction and restoration of indigenous fish species / stocks is a responsibility of the committee, which is comprised of representatives from the fishery management agencies of Ontario, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The LEC accepts this responsibility and will actively, and in a timely manner, address the potential, feasibility, biological implications, commercial and recreational fishing impacts and costs associated with restoration and rehabilitation of species such as lake sturgeon, lake herring, sauger, etc. The LEC may actively seek partners in pursuing restoration efforts, but the LEC will implement and coordinate all reintroduction and restoration programs approved by the five jurisdictional management agencies.

**Adopted:**

Annual Lake Erie Committee Meeting

March 31 – April 1, 1999

Grand Island, NY