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**Submission to
U.S. Department of
Homeland Security –
United States Coast Guard**

**Public Comment for
Great Lakes Security Zones**

November 2006

Brian Masse, MP

on behalf of the
New Democratic Party of Canada



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November 10, 2006

Department of Homeland Security
United States Coast Guard
External Affairs
1240 E. 9th Street, Suite 2073
Cleveland, Ohio
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To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Submission and Comments for Great Lakes Safety Zones

On behalf of the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP), our Party Leader, the Honourable Jack Layton MP (Toronto - Danforth), and as the federal Member of Parliament for Windsor West (Ontario, Canada), I write you today in opposition to the implementation of live-round, machine gun firing ranges on the Great Lakes by your United States Coast Guard for safety, health and environmental reasons.

The submissions I make today are a result of on-going discussions between our Party and municipal leaders in jurisdictions including Cornwall, Sarnia, Toronto and Windsor, Ontario, as well as business leaders, environmental groups and concerned citizens.

Safety

Located as close as five miles from the Canadian border, these live-fire exercises pose a direct threat to the safety of many Canadians. I understand that your Coast Guard patrol boats are armed with M240 medium machine guns that are capable of firing 600 rounds per minute, with a maximum range of 3.5 kilometres or around two miles.

With our border in such close proximity to your firing zones, and all along the Great Lakes with the exception of Lake Michigan, I believe that these gun boats could possibly harm innocent Canadians and Americans during recreational activities while alongside or on the waters.

It has been made clear that your gun boats have live-fire zones in areas that are popular with amateur boating enthusiasts and fishermen. It has been suggested that these live-fire zones will take up 2.5% of the total surface area of the Great Lakes, or 2,376 square miles. It is absolutely essential, that while using this large amount of geographic space, firing across shipping lanes, and putting the lives of innocent, international bystanders in jeopardy, that you take the time to re-negotiate the 1817 Ross-Bagot Treaty with the Canadian Government, and also negotiate your proposed live-fire zones to determine the safest areas for your exercises.

Health

It is clear that our health, on both sides of the border will be in danger if these gun boats are allowed to continue their exercises on these waters. I understand that there have already been several live-fire drills performed with these weapons that can fire up to 600 rounds per minute up to a range of approximately two miles. This means that over the next ten years, 32 metric tons of lead will be deposited into the water that 40 million North Americans on both sides of the border depend on as a primary source of drinking water.

Moreover, a recent report published by the Harvard School of Public Health states that one in six children now has a developmental disability, many of them learning problems, sensory deficits and developmental delays that affect the nervous system due to exposure to chemicals like lead and mercury. The recent live-fire exercises could have left up to 75,000 lead bullets in our Great Lakes thus far this year.

In a period where there has been a massive bi-national campaign to reduce the lead content of the Lakes, including prohibiting the use of lead paint on boats, I urge you to take the time to study the effects of these live-fire exercises on both the health of our residents in Canada and the United States as well as the impact that this lead will have on our environment and ecosystems in the Great Lakes.

Environment

Following the same aforementioned arguments about the impacts that lead will have on human health, we must also take into consideration the impact that this lead will have on our shared ecosystems and environment.

Although the Coast Guard's reports on the environmental impact of these exercises claims that there is "no elevated risk" to the ecological system of the Lakes, there is clearly a need to have an independent report produced by an organization such as the International Joint Commission which reports to both of our governments, to determine the said dangers to our shared waters.

Several independent environmental groups have, to date, voiced their concerns about the long-term implications for both wildlife and water supply caused specifically by the amount of lead that will permeate the lakes and subsequently, the food chain.

Conclusion

It is clear that several questions remain about the safety of both Canadians and Americans in the waters. I believe that live-fire exercises need to be suspended until we can determine whether or not the absolute safety and well-being of all can be determined.

The health of both Canadians and Americans is being jeopardized by the amount of lead deposited into the Great Lakes by these exercises. Approximately 40 million residents on both sides of our border continue to drink from the Great Lakes water basin despite the lack of an independent study on the possible effects of the lead bullets on our health.

In an era when we are trying to bring the Great Lakes back into "better" health for all humans, and of our shared ecosystem, the introduction of more poisons and toxins is neither progressive, nor wise.

Recommendations

The NDP believes that the live-fire exercises by the United States Coast Guard should be immediately suspended until the following has taken place:

1. An immediate renegotiation of the Ross-Bagot Treaty of 1817 by both the United States and Canadian governments to determine whether the guns are legal on these boats;
2. An immediate and firm commitment by the United States Government that these exercises will not take place, at any given instance, in Canadian waters or will not put Canadians' safety in jeopardy;
3. An immediate and independent study on the impacts that the lead bullets will have on human health, our shared water supply, ecosystem and environment has been completed – preferably by the International Joint Commission which is responsible to both federal governments;
4. That any recommendations by the IJC or similar investigating agency be considered in full prior to any further training exercises; and
5. Given the recent electoral changes in Both your Congress and Senate, that Members of both Houses be consulted again about this issue before reinstating training exercises.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to consider the devastating impact that these live-fire zones may have on Canadians and I hope that you can appreciate the concerns and recommendations that we make. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly should you have any questions or concerns.

Yours truly,



Brian Masse, MP
Windsor West