



**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 5095 – Reducing Ballast Water Protections
House Commerce and Trade Committee
Representative Eric Leutheuser, Chair**

Submitted by
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Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
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Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, on behalf of its 2,300 plus members, wishes to express our opposition to House Bill (HB) 5095. HB 5095 would weaken Michigan's ballast water program by adopting the U.S. Coast Guard standards. This bill would expose our Great Lakes to the introduction and spread of invasive aquatic species discharged by vessels at a tremendous cost to taxpayers, as well as private citizens and corporations.

Nearly all of Michigan's waterways have suffered substantial environmental impacts over time. This is especially true when you consider the impact of invasive species upon the Great Lakes. Invasive species such as round gobies, zebra and quagga mussels, sea lamprey, and ruffe have taken over Great Lakes ecosystems not only at the expense of native species, but also to the expense of Great Lakes residents and businesses as well.

Since the 1800s, more than 180 alien species have invaded the Great Lakes ecosystem from around the world, costing us billions, and in some cases, irreparably damaging the Great Lakes ecosystem. Ship ballast is the primary pathway for the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species, which cause tremendous damage by feeding on and out-competing native species, fouling beaches, degrading fisheries, clogging water intake pipes and other infrastructure, disrupting the food chain, and contaminating drinking water.

The negative economic impact of invasive species is in the billions of dollars and once they are introduced into the Great Lakes ecosystem, controlling them is a losing battle. Invasive species adversely affect many commercial, agricultural, aquacultural, and recreational activities that rely heavily on a strong and stable ecosystem. In 2005, economic losses in the Great Lakes Basin from aquatic invasive species were estimated to exceed \$5.7 billion per year. New research from Wisconsin suggests the negative economic impacts of invasives in the Great Lakes is dramatically underestimated. The study from researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found just one non-native species in one inland lake triggered \$80 million to \$163 million in damages, indicating that previous estimates on invasive species are not even close to the true cost. Additionally, the costs incurred by the state, local municipalities, and businesses to respond to the introduction of an aquatic invasive species is quite significant. Damage estimate from zebra mussels alone are \$6.4 billion a year. Furthermore, just one

aquatic invasive plant, Eurasian watermilfoil, reduced Vermont lakefront property values up to 16 percent and Wisconsin lakefront property values by 13 percent.

House Bill 5095 would interfere with the state regulatory processes already underway by eliminating an important tool now being used to address invasive species pollution in ship ballast. Michigan's Ballast Water Control Permit, the first of its kind in the nation, requires ongoing vessels to treat their ballast water prior to entering Michigan ports or certify they will not discharge ballast water to prevent aquatic invasive species from being introduced into Michigan's waters. Michigan has taken action using scientifically sound methods under the Clean Water Act's existing authority to set standards to control the largest known source of new invasions.

House Bill 5095 would remove these current protections and replace them with weaker U.S. Coast Guard standards which are not enough to protect the Great Lakes and Michigan waters from all aquatic invaders. The risk is not worth the gain. With less than 2% of Michigan's port traffic from overseas, we would be risking the health of the Great Lakes and Michigan's public health and economy to ease restrictions on approximately five or six vessels, according to DEQ estimates.

The provisions of this legislation would replace our current protections with an ineffective regulatory scheme that places the economic burden associated with aquatic invasive species on Michigan's citizens. While scientists throughout the region agree that invasive species are one of the greatest threats to the Great Lakes, you do not have to be a scientist to recognize the damage these invaders inflict on our fisheries, economy, and human health. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose House Bill 5095 and insist that we keep the state ballast water protections we currently have in place.