Submitted: John Jackson – February 25, 2026

IJC TAP extremely important document

RE: February 4 and 5, 2026 Public Forum & IJC listening session

From: Great Lakes Ecoregion Network

Now that the Parties have released their 2025 Progress Report of the Parties and the State of the Great Lakes 2025 Report, your task of developing your Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) takes on new significance as a framing document for Great Lakes strategies—especially items (iii) and (v) as noted below.

Under Article 7, Part 1 (k), the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement defines this undertaking as: providing to the Parties, in consultation with the Boards established under Article 8, a triennial "Assessment of Progress Report" that includes:

(i) a review of the Progress Report of the Parties;
(ii) a summary of Public input on the Progress Report of the Parties;
(iii) an assessment of the extent to which programs and other measures are achieving the General and Specific Objectives of this Agreement;
(iv) consideration of the most recent State of the Lakes Report; and
(v) other advice and recommendations, as appropriate;

The recently released 2025 Progress Report of the Parties (PROP) is largely an assessment of staff and Annex Committee activities, including reports completed, or deadlines met or missed, but it lacks analysis of the quality of work and analysis of ecological outcomes and impacts related to those actions and Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement goals.

Similarly, the State of the Great Lakes 2025 Report (SOGL), like its predecessors, uses metrics that have little actionable value for determining ongoing strategies. Averaging a range of conditions and concluding the lakes as a whole are "Fair" and the trend is "Unchanging" offers no guidance on specific threats or solutions. Do we want to remain "Fair?" Are we comfortable with "Unchanging" conditions? Attached is a letter that we sent to the Parties earlier today, which contains more detail on our concerns with these two reports from the Parties.

Your TAP report under the GLWQA is a major opportunity for a needed independent evaluation of the link between the Parties' actions as detailed in the PROP and the state of the Great Lakes. People throughout the Great Lakes Basin are counting on you to point out a direction with specific changes that will improve the health of the Great Lakes.

In making your TAP recommendations, we urge you to focus on the "principles and approaches" [Article 2, 4] of the Agreement. These include items such as precaution, prevention, sustainability, virtual elimination, and zero discharge." The Parties have been paying only minimal attention to these principles when making

decisions. We urge you to use TAP to recommend that the Agreement's principles and approaches be the prime basis – the determinant - upon which decisions are made, and around which precautionary, regulatory and restorative strategies are shaped.

We are pleased to see your "listening sessions", which start on Feb. 5 and continue over the next couple of months.

This letter and the attached letter that we sent to the parties are the start of the Great Lakes Ecoregion Network's submission. Many of our members will also be submitting their recommendations at the Forum and over the next two months.

A small group of concerned and experienced leaders from around the Great Lakes formed the Great Lakes Ecoregion Network in 2022. Our aim is to encourage transboundary discourse and consultation among leaders and the concerned public about long-term strategies to safeguard and enhance the vitality and resilience of the Great Lakes and the many living systems, including human communities, which depend upon them.

On September 27, 2022 we released "The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement at Fifty," our critique of the state of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in its fiftieth year and our recommendations for the directions that we need to take in the future. We are attaching this document (and its "Highlights" summary) again as little has changed over the last three years in terms of the needs and directions we identified in the report. We urge you to include 3 these ideas and recommendations in that report when developing your TAP. We also would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you our report and its relevance for your TAP report.

For the fair Great Lakes to be truly great, Great Lakes, we need a strong transboundary partnership between governments at multiple levels, the public, and the private sector. The IJC can play a unique and critical role in shaping the aspirations and approaches through which those partnerships can act effectively. We submit these materials in this spirit for your consideration.

On behalf of the Great Lakes Ecoregion Network,
John Jackson, Canada, and Jane Elder, United States.