Submitted: Alejandra - April 3, 2026
Comment - 2025 Progress Report of the Parties

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The Anji Inaashkawun team is a cross-cultural initiative based at Algoma University that places Indigenous partnerships, knowledge, and community voices at the heart of freshwater stewardship in Bawaating, the place of the rapids. Our goal is to strengthen intercultural relationships that support the collective care of water through community events, sharing resources, creative storytelling and education, cultural practices, and innovative regenerative economies.

Comments

After the revision of the Progress Report of the Parties, we highlight the following key topics that connect the IJC priorities to a holistic perspective of water eco-social health and community wellbeing.

Indigenous engagement and governance
From stakeholders to decision makers: The report alludes to engaging Indigenous Peoples in governance, but in implementation, Indigenous peoples are treated more as stakeholders rather than decision-makers or equal partners. We call for engaging Indigenous people as active decision makers and leaders to guide policy direction.

Important from ethical governance and eco-social health perspective. Indigenous peoples engaged in cultural resurgence and stewardship continue to lead effective environmental care and climate action globally, for the embetterment of planetary health.

Integrating Indigenous ontologies: Indigenous ontologies are ecocentric and essential for comprehending the relationship between human and ecological health. Working towards health in the Great Lakes requires acknowledging Indigenous jurisdiction, leadership, and epistemologies to foster integrative and multigenerational actions. Many have engaged in the practices of their ancestors, who have been the original stewards of this land for millennia.

Fish Populations and Quagga Mussels

Efforts for Lake Trout and Sturgeon are visible. However, there is a critical need for more research on Lake Whitefish, given its profound ecological, cultural, and economic significance to the region. Those efforts should aim to understand human-induced impacts on fish health and the role the whitefish plays in the broader Great Lakes ecosystem (ecological, cultural, and economic).

Connecting to the Great Lakes

We would like to highlight the use of the expression "restoring beneficial uses". Understanding water as only a “resource” for human benefit undermines water's role in sustaining life for all species. This resource-based understanding of water leads to cultural and societal misuse of water, leading to the degradation of freshwater health. The degradation of water health intimately impacts all human, plant, and animal communities within the Great Lakes Basin. Learning from the leadership of the Anishnaabee and Métis in our region, it is important to understand water as a relationship rather than a resource. This understanding shifts individuals and communities to act respectfully and responsibly when making decisions regarding our shared waterways. The key to this cultural shift is connection. Fostering relationships to water through food, recreation, art, and ceremony is part of taking care of the water and fosters collective, intergenerational care for the ecosystem. Furthermore, it restores physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being in human communities across the Basin.

We are grateful to the International Joint Commission for the opportunity to provide comments and for its ongoing efforts to engage with the communities connected to the Great Lakes.