

Superior TELEGRAM

Council seeks IMO standard for ballast water permits

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The Superior City Council is adding its concern to the chorus of voices speaking out on a proposed ballast water permit in Wisconsin.

The proposal requires commercial ocean-going ships and those transporting cargo between Great Lakes ports to take steps to reduce aquatic invasive species in the ballast water they release into Wisconsin waters.

The council voted unanimously to pass a resolution stating its concern for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources proposal to adopt regulations more stringent than those in neighboring states.

The permit, as proposed, will add to the patchwork of regulations created to address the problem of invasive species, and uses standards 100 times more stringent than the International Maritime Organization, a standard that is unattainable with existing technology.

The resolution adopted by the council Tuesday night puts the council on record as opposing regulations as they are written and urges the state to adopt a ballast water permitting requirement that recognize standards adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for ocean-going vessels, which are consistent with standards adopted by Minnesota, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Pennsylvania.

"This resolution is very important, not only for this city, but for those whose jobs depend on our city being a key port," said Andy Lisak, director of the Development Association in Superior. Flanked by members of the longshoremen's union, Lisak said, the permit would put Superior and other Wisconsin ports at a competitive disadvantage when compared to neighboring states.

If the ballast water permits were adopted as written, Superior would be subject to more stringent regulations than those of Duluth in spite of the shared port system.

"As it is right now, we will be at a competitive disadvantage," Lisak said. "What that translates into is a loss of business for our port, and the loss of jobs and the loss of tax revenue for the city, the county and the state of Wisconsin."

At a time of national recession and a state budget crisis, Lisak said, the last thing the state should do is anything that is going to result in the loss of jobs and tax revenue.

Councilor Dan Olson relinquished his seat on the council to speak as a business manager for a labor organization.

"The implication of the loss of revenue is very important to the city, the state ...," Olson said. Olson asked the council to be a partner with the state to make sure the legislation gets thorough review, to ensure Superior isn't at a competitive disadvantage.

"This is very important that we support this," Olson said.

Councilor Ed Anderson likened the patchwork of ballast water regulations to the difficulty experienced in interstate commerce when each state issued its own currency.

"Pretty soon it just didn't work," Anderson said. "Interstate commerce was impossible to deal with because there were so many different rules and regulations ... Apparently we haven't learned very much since that time because we're on the same road with some of these environmental regulations." He said the standard the state is proposing is impossible to meet with existing technology.

While councilors agree protecting the Great Lakes from invasive species is important, but doing so in a way that doesn't hurt the state's economy is equally important. The council voted unanimously in favor of standards adopted by adjacent states.

Thursday night, the Douglas County Board considers a similar resolution in advance of a public hearing on ballast water permits scheduled for Monday in Milwaukee.