

### **Panelist Abstract**

**Panelist:** Peter Boyer, Social Scientist/Secretary to SAB, International Joint Commission

**Name of Session:** Session IV. Lessons of Experience - Longstanding Multicountry Institutions

**Presentation Title:** The Role of the IJC and the Development of a Binational Regime in Relation to the North American Laurentian Great Lakes

### **Summary of Key Issues and Best Practices/Lessons Learned**

The Great Lakes and its connecting channels comprise about one third of the border between the U.S. and Canada, contain approximately 20 per cent of the fresh water on earth, and 95 per cent of the fresh water in North America. The five lakes and the St. Lawrence River form the major drainage basin from the North American continent, and are home to one fifth of the Canadian population, and one seventh of the American population. A brief description of the historical context and importance of the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty between the U.S. and Canada is provided, particularly in relation to the establishment of the International Joint Commission. An overview of the structure, operations and practices of the Commission that characterizes its role under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and the binational regime that supports the shared management of the Great lakes is outlined. A regime is broadly defined in terms of the existence of bilateral or multilateral agreements and their institutional mechanisms, that involve not only governments, but also non-governmental organizations, and citizens. The consequences of industrialization and urbanization since the middle of the twentieth century threatened the integrity of this vast transboundary water resource, and affected the human health of basin residents. In addressing these challenges, the major factors that account for the success of the binational regime are defined, and its effectiveness is evaluated. Key factors include community development, binational cooperation, equality and parity, adoption of common objectives, joint fact-finding and research, flexibility and adaptability, and openness towards the sharing of information. Efficacy is evaluated in terms of goal attainment, problem-solving capability, commitments to implementation, and long term sustainability. The important role of the IJC and its advisory institutions under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement is highlighted.

### **Key References**

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