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## DEP Issues 2003 Harbor Water Quality Report Showing Cleaner Waterways And Wildlife Resurgence

### Harbor Quality Improved by 98 Percent in Last 30 Years

Commissioner Christopher O. Ward of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that the agency has issued the annual New York Harbor Water Quality Report. The 2003 report is the 94th in the series, and details improvements in harbor water quality realized through investments in critical infrastructure and better management of the City's sewage and sewage treatment systems.

"Water quality in New York Harbor is the best it's been in decades, showing significant declines in pollutants and increases in dissolved oxygen," said Commissioner Ward. "Even ignoring the scientific data, the anecdotal evidence is abundant, from the vast number of waterfowl breeding in the area, to increased populations of bottom-dwelling organisms, to the fact that beach closures have been virtually eliminated.

"We're winning the battle for the overall Harbor, but there's still work to be done. The next battleground is the local waterways that are enclosed and in close proximity to people and sewage outfalls – places such as Flushing Bay in Queens, Paerdegat Basin in Brooklyn and other parts of Jamaica Bay. This is where we need to concentrate our future efforts, even as we reap the benefits of decades of investment in the Harbor as a whole."

The 2003 Report notes that fecal coliform levels – an indicator of the presence of raw or partially treated sewage and one of the most important water quality indicators – dropped by over 98 percent in the Inner Harbor and Upper East River since the early 1970s. The trend coincides with upgrades to the four sewage treatment plants that serve those areas: Bowery Bay, Tallman Island, Hunts Point and Wards Island. Other reasons for improvements include better monitoring and control of industrial discharges and the abatement of illegal dumping into the sewer system.

The Report also details the problems associated with combined sewer overflows (CSOs), or the discharge of

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untreated wastewater during rainstorms and periods of heavy snow melting. Better management of the sewer system and capital improvements have increased the capture of overflow at sewage treatment plants from 18 percent to 72 percent over the last 13 years. In fact, the DEP has developed a series of Best Management Practices which have been largely adopted by the federal EPA as the standard for all communities with CSO problems.

The DEP has also identified 36 CSO abatement projects, totaling over \$500 million. These vary from the construction of massive underground storage tanks near Flushing Bay and Paerdegat Basin to the deployment of booms and nets in canals and creeks near 23 other CSO outfalls. The DEP uses skimmer boats in the Harbor to collect floating trash and debris from CSOs and storm sewers, and collected over 1,200 tons of material this way in 2003 on just its largest skimmer vessel, the Cormorant.

Another pollution control program listed in the 2003 Report restricts the discharge of certain types of industrial waste into the sewer system. Over the last 12 years, the number of firms regulated under this program has increased from 1,000 to 30,000, with no increase in DEP staff. During that time, heavy metals in wastewater has dropped from 7,800 lbs. to 2,800 lbs. per day citywide. Heavy industry now accounts for less than one percent of the metals in untreated sewage citywide.

In 1998, the DEP initiated a program to eliminate the discharge of untreated sewage into the Harbor during dry weather. This program involved a detailed evaluation of the City's entire 425 miles of shoreline and over 3,000 sewer outfalls. The initial survey found that there was over 3 million gallons a day of untreated sewage being dumped into the Harbor daily. To date, the DEP has eliminated 96 percent of these discharges.

In 1997, the DEP began its annual Enhanced Beach Protection Program to decrease dry weather sewage discharges through better surveillance and improved preventive maintenance. As part of this effort, 92 sewage pumping stations throughout the City have had computerized monitoring equipment installed. As a result, the total amount of untreated sewage bypassed from pump stations and regulators during the 2002 season was just 0.0002 percent of total dry weather flow, a 97 percent decrease from the previous year.

"Some of the main benefits to New Yorkers of all this work and investment is that all public beaches in the City have been open for bathing since 1992, and wet weather swimming advisories have been lifted at all but three of these beaches," said Commissioner Ward. "Shore birds have returned to breed in several parts of the Harbor, and fish and shellfish restrictions have been relaxed.

"The Harbor Survey Program provides the longest documented assessment of the impact of human activities on the City's water," he continued. "By sampling at 53 stations and measuring more than a dozen water quality parameters throughout the Harbor, the survey identifies trends and changes and provides a unique database for scientists and educators."