

Backgrounder Document d'information



Ministry of Natural Resources

Ministère des Richesses naturelles

January 8, 2007

VHS AND RESTRICTIONS ON TRANSFER OF LIVE BAIT FISH IN ONTARIO

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia

- Viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) is a viral disease previously found in several species of freshwater and saltwater fish in Europe, Japan, and the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of North America, that has recently been discovered in fish in the lower Great Lakes.
- VHS does not pose a threat to human health but it does pose a threat to Ontario's fish stocks. Fish with VHS are safe to eat.
- The disease was first found in Ontario in association with a die-off of freshwater drum in April 2005 in the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario.
- VHS was also found in yellow perch, muskellunge and round gobies that died off in 2005 and 2006. VHS has since been found in many species of fish from lakes St. Clair, Erie and Ontario, as well as from the Detroit, Niagara and St. Lawrence rivers.
- Emerald shiners and bluntnose minnows – both used as live bait fish in Ontario – are two of the 37 species known to carry VHS elsewhere in the world.
- There is a serious risk that moving live bait fish infected with VHS from southern Ontario into the waters of central and northern Ontario will spread the virus. There is a significant concern that this will damage fish populations.
- The Ontario and Canadian governments are working together to better understand this threat and agree that taking immediate action to stop the transfer of potentially infected bait fish into new waters is necessary.

Actions to Control VHS

- Ontario is putting in place interim restrictions on the transfer of live bait fish to control the spread of VHS through restrictions on commercial bait licences.
- The province has been divided into an infected zone, a buffer zone and a virus-free zone (see a [map of the zones](#)). Effective immediately, **live bait fish**:
 - Cannot be commercially harvested in the infected zone, although stored bait in the infected zone can be sold
 - Cannot be moved from the infected zone to the buffer zone or the virus-free zone
 - Cannot be moved from the buffer zone to the virus-free zone
 - Can be moved from the virus-free zone and buffer zone into the infected zone.
- Changes to these licence conditions may be made, if warranted by new information.
- The Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are working together on a comprehensive approach that will address live fish transfers within Ontario, and will be announced in the spring of 2007.

- These government agencies are developing options for regulating live bait fish transfers that will include consultation with stakeholders such as the bait industry, anglers, the aquaculture industry and the commercial fishing industry. The proposed options will address the transfer of live bait fish within and outside of Ontario.
- In addition, the Ministry of Natural Resources is contributing to a surveillance plan being developed by the federal government and is developing a public education program.
- The ministry is seeking the co-operation of all stakeholders, including the commercial bait industry and anglers, to assist in slowing down the spread of the virus to uninfected lakes, rivers and streams.
- The ministry is implementing reasonable and realistic restrictions by balancing the need to act to conserve our native fish populations with a recognition of the effect that these restrictions may have on the livelihoods of some its stakeholders.

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Contact:

John Cooper
Lake Erie Management Unit
Ministry of Natural Resources
519-873-4613

Canadian Food Inspection Agency
613-228-6682

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