

For Immediate Release
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ONTARIO GOVERNMENT ACTING SWIFTLY TO CONTROL FURTHER SPREAD OF NEW FISH VIRUS

Restricts Use Of Live Bait Fish For The 2007 Winter Fishing Season

TORONTO — The Ontario government is taking immediate steps to control the further spread of a new fish virus into lakes and rivers in central and northern Ontario, Natural Resources Minister David Ramsay announced today.

“Viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) has recently been discovered in fish from the lower Great Lakes,” said Ramsay. “While not a threat to human health, it has been linked to the die-offs of at least four species of fish. We’re asking all anglers and bait fish dealers in the affected areas to help slow down the spread of VHS to protect fish species by observing the necessary restrictions on the transport and use of live bait fish this winter.”

Waters known to be infected with the virus include Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Restrictions are necessary because a large portion of the bait fish harvested for sale to anglers for winter fishing in Ontario is caught in Lake Erie and the upper Niagara River. If the virus spreads to Ontario’s inland waters and upper Great Lakes, it could have serious ecological, social and economic impacts.

To control the spread of the virus, effective immediately, Ontario has been divided into three zones – the infected zone, the buffer zone and the virus-free zone. (See a [map of the zones](#)).

- In the **infected zone**, south of Highways 401 and 402 across Ontario, live bait fish will not be allowed to be commercially harvested or transported north of the two highways.
- In the **buffer zone**, north of Highways 401 and 402 to the northern limits of Fisheries Management Zones (FMZ) 16, 17 and 18, as well as all of FMZ 12 east of FMZ 18, and Zone 13 (Lake Huron), live bait fish can be harvested and used but cannot be transported north of these fisheries management zones.
- In the remainder of Ontario, known as the **virus-free zone**, live bait fish can be harvested and transported as usual.

VHS is an infectious disease of fish caused by the viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus. Several known strains of VHS are found in freshwater and saltwater fish around the world. Recently, a new strain of VHS has been found in the lower Great Lakes – the first time VHS has been detected in freshwater in Canada.

Ontario, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans are currently working together on a comprehensive plan to be in place by the spring of 2007, to control the spread of the virus to new areas of Ontario and other provinces. Restrictions on the use of live bait fish are necessary while the more comprehensive plan is being developed.

In October 2006, the United States Department of Agriculture banned the import of certain live fish from Ontario and Quebec, as well as the transport of live fish within the eight U.S. Great Lakes states. In late November, New York State imposed additional restrictions on the harvest and transport of live fish, including bait fish, within New York State.

Note: See attached backgrounder and link to map of Ontario's new Fisheries Management Zones.

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