

**Testimony of
Doug Adamo, Co-Chair
Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan Advisory Committee
to the
New York City Council
Committee on Environmental Protection**

June 26, 2006

I am Doug Adamo, Chief of the Division of Natural Resources at Gateway National Recreation Area. I am appearing here today on behalf of the Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). As you know quite well, Mr. Chairman, Local Law 71 created the Advisory Committee, which consists of seven members, each from different institutions with an interest in the future of a healthy Jamaica Bay. The Advisory Committee has been charged with providing advice and recommendations to the Council and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on the Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan (Plan). The Advisory Committee greatly appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of Introduction No. 376.

The Advisory Committee strongly supports all aspects of this bill, which would amend the administrative code of the City of New York in relation to the Plan, including specifically certain milestones related to the development of the Plan. Local Law 71, enacted almost a year ago, was a figurative “watershed” event in the history of Jamaica Bay, the City’s most important ecological and endangered resource. Local Law 71 requires DEP to develop the Plan to “restore and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of Jamaica bay.” Intro No. 376 will, among other things, extend the deadlines relating to the Plan’s development and add interim milestones, all of which, in the Advisory Committee’s view, will serve to increase support for the

Plan, improve its technical aspects, and ultimately lead to a faster and improved restoration of Jamaica Bay. The Committee also respectfully notes that it believes the revised process as set forth in the legislation to be a carefully calibrated one, and would hope that the bill's milestones are not modified later in the legislative process so as to disrupt the current balance.

The Advisory Committee would like to address, and voice support for, a couple of particular aspects of Intro. No. 376. First, the Advisory Committee supports the bill's one-year extension of DEP's time to develop the Plan. While one year is on the outside edge of what the Advisory Committee views as an appropriate length of extension, it remains reasonable. In the end, we anticipate that the extension will contribute to a better Plan by DEP, and the additional time will provide the Advisory Committee, the public and other agencies with more opportunities to provide input and feedback. We remain of the view, as we believe the Council was when it passed Local Law 71, that the Plan should be a "living" document. Local Law 71 requires review and revision of the Plan, as well as a report on progress, every two years; Intro No. 376 would not modify these requirements. The Advisory Committee will continue to urge DEP to complete the first iteration of the Plan as rapidly as practicable, so that actions can begin to be taken and Jamaica Bay starts to see the rewards of everyone's work.

Second, the Advisory Committee strongly supports the additional steps in the development of the Plan that are proposed by Intro. No. 376. The current law requires the Advisory Committee to submit its recommendations by July 1, 2006, and DEP to then finalize its Plan by September 1, 2006. The legislation being considered today would add several significant interim milestones to this process, in conjunction with extending the date for final release of the Plan by a year. The

Advisory Committee would still submit recommendations by July 1st; indeed, as we discuss more at the conclusion of our testimony, the Committee is looking forward to the submission of these recommendations at the end of this week. Pursuant to the proposed process, on September 1, 2006, DEP would provide a response to these recommendations, thus enabling the Advisory Committee and the public with an opportunity to provide comments prior to DEP's release of a draft Plan by March 1, 2007 and a final Plan by September 1, 2007. This iterative process will maximize exchange of information and perspectives between DEP, the Advisory Committee, and the public. To date, the Advisory Committee has found that our relationship with DEP to be rewarding and productive – DEP is clearly committed to this process and to helping the Bay, and has been a very engaged partner with the Advisory Committee. Input from the public has also been significant and invaluable in helping the Advisory Committee along its learning curve. Given how well things have gone to date, and the continuing commitment from all members of the Advisory Committee to see this process through, we believe that the steps proposed to be added by Intro. No. 376 will improve the Plan and its ultimate chance of success.

Jamaica Bay's value to the city, the region, and the nation is immeasurable. Accessible to America's most populated city by subway and bus, Jamaica Bay is a haven for wildlife and the millions of people who visit the area each year. Yet, as this Committee knows all too well, Jamaica Bay's resources are in jeopardy. Thousands of acres of the bay's marshlands are mysteriously disappearing. Scientists predict that, at the current rate, the marsh islands will completely vanish in less than twenty years. Poor, and in some places deteriorating, water quality remains a continuing problem for the bay, and may even be spurring the marsh loss.

In response to this crisis, in 2005, the City of New York enacted Local Law 71, marking a new commitment by the City to saving this truly special place. This Thursday, the Advisory Committee will provide its first formal contribution to the process. As called for by Local Law 71, we will be submitting our recommendations on the Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan. In anticipation, and in the hope, that the legislation being considered today is enacted later this summer, we are considering these recommendations to be preliminary and a work in progress. The Advisory Committee hopes that these initial recommendations are helpful to the Council and to DEP, and we will continue to work to improve them over the summer and throughout next year, again in anticipation of Intro. No. 376's passage and the submission of DEP's final Plan in September 2007.

Mr. Chairman, it is an understatement to say that your leadership to date has been the difference. We thank you and look forward to an extremely productive relationship on behalf of Jamaica Bay in the months ahead. Again, you have the Advisory Committee's greatest appreciation.