

**Lake Ontario Commercial Fishery
Summary, 1997-2004**

Steven R. LaPan
*New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
 Cape Vincent Fisheries Station
 Cape Vincent, New York 13618*

Commercial fishing activity in the New York waters of Lake Ontario is limited to the embayments and nearshore open waters of the eastern end of the lake. Commercial fishing gear includes gill nets, trap nets, and fyke nets. Commercial harvest is generally targeted at the following species (in decreasing order of abundance): yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), brown bullhead (*Ameiurus nebulosus*), sunfish (*Lepomis* sp.), white perch (*Morone americana*), rock bass (*Ambloplites rupestris*), and black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*). In 2004 the number of licensed, active commercial fishermen was four (Table 2). Fishing effort for yellow perch declined in 2003 and 2004 presumably due to a sharp decline in the average price paid per pound (\$1.19) relative to 2001 (\$1.75).

The recent decline in the number of fishermen is directly attributable to revocation of licenses held by five individuals involved in the illegal harvest and sale of American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) and walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum*). These illegal activities were elucidated through a two-year undercover investigation by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). One outcome of the investigation was the realization that mandatory reporting of commercial catch and sale filed by individual fishermen could contain falsified information. For this reason, the commercial sale and harvest data presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively, should be interpreted with caution.

Table 1. Approximate reported value (\$US) of the 2004 commercial catch from the New York waters of Eastern Lake Ontario. (*estimated mean value, as price fluctuates throughout the year Also, not all landed bullhead were sold).

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>TOTAL POUNDS</u>	<u>PRICE/POUND*</u>	<u>TOTAL VALUE</u>
Yellow Perch	37,066	\$1.19	\$ 43,976
Brown Bullhead	2,525	\$1.77	\$ 2,120

Estimated Total Value \$ 46,096

Table 2. Reported* commercial catch in pounds from the New York waters of Eastern Lake Ontario, 1991-2002.

	# Lic.	YP	BBH	WP	RB	SF	CRP	EEL	CAT	DRM
1991	18	62,049	56,320	10,943	1,906	4,159	2,357	-	200	2,909
1992	16	33,518	29,579	19,523	2,330	1,804	1,454	-	8	657
1993	17	21,205	22,126	14,866	1,106	2,291	1,372	-	4,166	4,268
1994	19	31,501	23,604	15,405	859	2,254	2,445	-	-	4,577
1995	19	38,234	14,281	1,624	1,643	568	564	-	-	2,701
1996	19	34,344	16,814	3,128	1,445	2,806	857	-	4,914	4,402
1997	10	43,985	7,471	428	137	765	-	785	3	2
1998	11	62,905	5,332	330	196	1,189	18	-	-	-
1999	7	38,875	6,744	13	233	2,064	205	-	-	-
2000	6	59,928	5,709	383	280	3,571	308	-	-	-
2001	6	40,323	5,875	442	15	16	-	-	-	-
2002	6	37,223	4,435	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2003	3	6,153	5,815	-	-	-	150	-	-	-
2004	4	37,066	2,525	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*does not include documented illegal or unreported harvest

Lic. = number of active fishers

YP = yellow perch

BBH = brown bullhead

WP = white perch

RB = rock bass

SF = sunfish (pumpkinseed, bluegill)

CRP = black crappie

EEL = American eel

CAT = channel catfish

DRM = freshwater drum