Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Hearing on
"Control of Anti-Fouling Systems of Ships"
June 10, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling today's hearing to discuss and inform the members on anti-fouling systems on ships.

Biological fouling is the unwanted accumulation of microorganisms, plants and animals on structures that are exposed to the marine environment. It can also accelerate corrosion on a vessel's hull and on offshore and coastal marine structures. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year to combat the consequences biological fouling on commercial and recreational vessels. Biological fouling has also been the conduit for transferring invasive species, contaminating ecosystems throughout the world.

Anti-fouling is the process of preventing or removing the biological fouling that has accumulated on submerged structures. There are a number of anti-fouling substances used over the past 50 years, but the most toxic to date has been tributyltin also known as TBT.

TBT has been found in the waters of marinas, ports, harbors, open seas and oceanic waters. It has caused shell deformations in oysters and has been found in whales, dolphins and other marine animals.

In October 2001, the International Maritime Organization adopted the International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships, which was entered into force on September 17, 2007. The Convention required signatories of the Convention to ban the new application of TBT coatings on vessels by January 1, 2003, and required vessels to have TBT coatings removed or covered by January 1, 2008.

In the United States, anti-fouling systems containing organotins, including TBT, are regulated under Organotin Anti-Fouling Paint Control Act of 1988 (OAPCA). Under this legislation, organotin-based anti-fouling paints are banned vessels under 25 meters and the leaching rate of anti-fouling is limited on larger vessels.

It is important for the United States to become a signatory to the International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-Fouling Systems on Ships. This Convention will ultimately replace the Organotin Anti-Fouling Paint Control Act of 1988 (OAPCA).

I want to thank the Coast Guard and Environmental Protection Agency for being here today and look forward to your testimony.

Chairman Cummings, I look forward to working with you and Ranking Members Mica and LoBiondo to pass legislation that will provide the Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection with the legal tools they need to implement the Convention's requirements to protect our waters.