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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: May 12, 2008

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Secretary Bowles Nominates Boston Harbor as the Commonwealth's Newest Vessel No Discharge Area

*Under Patrick Administration proposal, Boston Harbor would be the largest port
in the nation designated as a boat sewage no discharge zone*

BOSTON – Public beaches, shellfish beds, and the Boston Harbor Islands National Park are among the priceless shoreline resources that stand to benefit from a Patrick Administration proposal urging the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to designate Boston Harbor as a No Discharge Area (NDA) for boat sewage. The proposed ban on dumping of all sewage – even treated waste – would extend from Winthrop to Hull.

Submitted through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Office, the proposed NDA is the product of months of work and leadership by the University of Massachusetts Urban Harbors Institute and public officials representing Harbor communities – particularly Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch.

If approved by the EPA, the Boston Harbor NDA would join a growing list of protected state waters. NDAs already cover the coastal waters of Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, and Harwich; Buzzards Bay; Waquoit Bay in Falmouth; Three Bays/Centerville Harbor in Barnstable; Chatham's Stage Harbor; Wellfleet Harbor; and coastal waters of Nantucket from Muskeget Island to Great Point. EPA is currently reviewing the Scituate-Cohasset-Marshfield and Salem Sound NDAs, and EEA also last week proposed an NDA for Cape Cod Bay. Related efforts are under way for the North Shore from Gloucester to Salisbury and Revere to Swampscott, and for Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds.

“Boston Harbor is cleaner now than it has been for generations, thanks to decades of work by federal, state and local authorities, and clean water advocates. Protecting the many public beaches and other resources throughout this stretch of urban coastline is a top priority of the Patrick Administration,” EEA Secretary Ian Bowles said. “The proposed No Discharge Area for Boston Harbor is a crucial step toward making the entire Massachusetts coastline off-limits to sewage dumping.”

In addition to Mayors Menino and Koch, the proposed NDA is supported by local harbor masters in each Boston Harbor community, the Quincy City Council, the Hull Conservation Commission, Weymouth Mayor Susan Kay, the Massachusetts Port Authority, the Massachusetts Marine Trades Association, The Boston Harbor Association, the Friends of Wollaston Beach, the Quincy Beaches and Coastal Commission, and the Charles River Watershed Association. Communication with and commitment from commercial operators such as whale watch boats, passenger vessel services, fishermen, and tug operators was also key to the effort.

“It took a big team to develop this application, which will make Boston Harbor the largest port in the country to prohibit boat sewage discharge,” said CZM Director Leslie-Ann McGee. “We at CZM would like to thank all those we worked with—most notably the city of Boston, which provided two new pump-out connections to properly dispose of the boat sewage; the city of Quincy, which began the process with the first local request for an NDA; and the Urban Harbors Institute of UMass-Boston, which coordinated the application process and wrote much of the application pro bono.”

The proposed Boston Harbor NDA is the capstone in a suite of recent improvements communities have made to address sources of pollution that harm beaches, shellfish and eelgrass beds, and water quality. Progress on this front includes upgrading local sewer infrastructure, eliminating illegal sewer connections to storm drains, reducing combined sewer overflows, implementing stormwater best management practices and providing vessel pump-out services to provide boaters with cost-free and environmentally-sound sewage disposal alternatives. The nearly 87-square-mile area covered by the Boston Harbor NDA includes 23 pump-out stations in Boston Harbor and the Charles River for recreational boats, and seven for the harbor’s commercial fleet. Three additional commercial pump-out facilities are planned by the city of Boston this year.

NDA’s protect water quality and aquatic life from pathogens, nutrients, and chemical products contained in discharged sewage, and also reduce the risk of human illness, making it safer to swim, boat, fish, and eat shellfish from protected waters. NDA’s can also impede the growth of harmful algae that occurs due to high nutrient levels in sewage discharge.

Under the Clean Water Act, a body of water can be designated an NDA if local, state, and federal authorities determine that the area is ecologically and recreationally important enough to merit protection above and beyond that provided by existing state and federal laws. In Massachusetts, EEA’s CZM office works closely with communities and the EPA to establish NDA’s as part of a comprehensive regional pollution abatement approach that includes

wastewater management through local sewerage initiatives, stormwater mitigation, and low impact development strategies.

For more information on No Discharge Areas in New England please visit:

www.mass.gov/czm/nda

<http://www.epa.gov/region01/eco/nodiscrg/index.html>.

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