



File photo by **DEREK RUTTAN** derek.ruttan@sunmedia.ca

The St. Clair River, which runs past Sarnia's Chemical Valley, is one of the "area of concern" in the Great Lakes system. Public Advisory Committees on the cleanups met in Sarnia to discuss progress.

Pressure urged for faster cleanup

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The public needs to put more pressure on governments to clean up the St. Clair River and other waterways in the Great Lakes region.

Members from a trio of Public Advisory Councils, or PACs, made that declaration following a recent gathering in Sarnia.

The three PACs have been working for more than two decades to improve the quality of the St. Clair, St. Marys and Detroit rivers.

Made up of environmental groups, concerned citizens, industrial representatives and First Nations people, they came from Detroit, Windsor, Buffalo and Sault Ste. Marie to attend the session.

"We need the general public to be involved, to help bring pressure to bear to ensure that the cleanup is successful," said John Jackson, director of Great Lakes United.

Much of the meeting was spent discussing ways to get government agencies on both sides of the border to speed up remediation. There's also a need, they said, for more funding to help PACs involve the broader public in the cleanup process.

Darrell Randell, president of Friends of the St. Clair, said, "Political will to get the work completed will only come to bear if the public understands these issues facing our waterways and lobby their elected officials to take action."

The PACs were organized in the late 1980s after the International Joint Commission identified 43 "areas of concern" in the Great Lakes, including the St. Clair River.

Since that time, the PACs have studied such issues as restrictions on fish consumption and drinking water, sediment contamination and loss of fish and wildlife habitat.

Although progress has been made over the years, the PACs say many challenges remain.

"We recognize that the PACs' role is in two directions," Jackson said. "The PACs advise government agencies in cleanup efforts, acting as a kind of watchdog. We also advise the public on the work that is being done and work that we consider necessary to be done."