

Freshwater Institute

Oceans Program

The adoption of the *Oceans Act* by the Government of Canada in 1997 represented an important new direction in the management of Canada's oceans. The Act extends Canada's jurisdiction, establishing an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) out to 200 nautical miles (370 km), and commits the Government of Canada to developing an oceans strategy for the management of marine ecosystems. The EEZ provides Canada with the responsibility and jurisdiction to protect the marine environment, to regulate scientific research and to control offshore installations and structures.

Canada's oceans support diverse and growing economic activities including shipping, fisheries, tourism, aquaculture, technology development, offshore oil and gas development and offshore mining. Since 1997, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has taken on a significant new role as the lead federal authority for oceans management. DFO is committed to fostering oceans management consistent with the principles of:

- Sustainable development, or development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs;
- Integrated management, which is an ongoing and collaborative approach bringing together interested parties to incorporate social, cultural, environmental and economic values; and
- A precautionary approach, or taking action to conserve and protect the oceans when scientific information is incomplete.

The vision of the Oceans Program group is to ensure healthy, safe and prosperous oceans for the benefit of current and future generations of Canadians. To support this vision four immediate goals have been identified:

- Develop a collaborative, integrated approach to oceans management;
- Expand working partnerships among oceans stakeholders and increase their responsibility and accountability;
- Optimize the economic potential of our oceans while ensuring their conservation and sustainability; and
- Position Canada as a world leader in oceans management.

The Arctic coastline comprises nearly 75% of Canada's total coastline. Sheer size alone suggests the Arctic is integral to oceans policy and program development within the national framework. More importantly, the Arctic is critical for such national issues as sovereignty and the maintenance of economic, social and cultural benefits for northerners. Sustaining the benefits of existing Arctic fish and marine mammal harvesting operations will be a vital feature to future aspirations for the north.

DFO, in conjunction with Inuvialuit organizations, industry and other government organizations have embarked on integrated management planning for the coastal and marine waters of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the western Arctic. The area for the first phase of this planning encompasses the Mackenzie River estuary and outer delta. This area includes the Beaufort Sea Beluga Management Plan Zone 1A, which has been identified as an area of interest for marine protection. DFO has also begun development of a community-based monitoring program called Tariuq (Oceans) Monitoring Program. This program is being developed through the Marine Environmental Quality program of the Oceans Act.

For more information about the *Oceans Act* or Oceans Program activities, contact the Freshwater Institute at 501 University Cr., Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N6; by phone at (204) 983-5000; or visit DFO's Oceans Conservation website at: www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/regions/CENTRAL/home-accueil_e.htm

