REVIEW
DIRECTORATE

DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE
DE L'EXAMEN

**REVIEW OF THE COMMUNICATIONS
FUNCTION IN DFO
PROJECT # 60168
FINAL REPORT
NOVEMBER 2003**
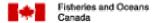
Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

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I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The history of the Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) Communications Function over the past decade mirrors that of most of the other communications functions across the Federal Government, being a much slimmed down version of itself. Currently, its responsibilities consist of Ministerial, issues-management, media relations, public environment and internal communications activities and advice. With the government placing greater emphasis on communications by the turn of the decade, communications branches faced additional demands, including for corporate horizontality (branding; government program priorities; government-wide marketing programs; etc.), new or renewed communication initiatives (internal communications; Government-On-Line; citizen access channels; program communications; etc.) and recently with the new Government of Canada (GOC) Communications Policy. Both National Headquarters (NHQ) Communications and the regional Communications Directorates were faced with increasing demands and in addition new corporate requirements from the Canadian Coast Guard and the Oceans sector.

One can conclude from the findings of the Review that the Communications Function in DFO will not be able to fully realize these additional requirements within their existing resource levels. Further, we conclude that without increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of the Communications role, the Communications Function cannot - as the document *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* suggests - "develop the foundation… to communicate the 'DFO story' and properly position the department with staff, the public and stakeholders." This assessment is based on a series of conclusions developed for each of the four objectives established for the Review. The conclusions were drawn from and reflect feedback given by Communications staff at the officer, manager, and senior management levels, including internal clients such as the Minister's Office, Assistant Deputy Ministers, Regional Directors General, Regional and Area Directors, in addition to the Associate Deputy Minister and external clients like staff from the Communications Secretariat at the Privy Council Office.

The Communications Branch developed *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* as an interim measure, cognizant that as the new strategic direction and priorities of DFO emanating from the Departmental Assessment and Alignment Project evolve, a departmental strategic communications plan is needed to strengthen its implementation and impact.

The cumulative results of the ongoing implementation of *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* [approved by the Departmental Management Committee (DMC) March 2003] will provide the foundation, enabling Communications to effectively communicate the new strategic direction of DFO. The recently approved national DFO Communications Policy (DMC July 2003) provides the framework.

The objectives of this review were to:

1. examine the current structure of the corporate communications function in headquarters and the regions in the context of their stated mandate, client expectations and demand, and benchmarks;
2. review the current state of affairs in the Communications Branch and in the regions including roles, responsibilities and processes;

3. determine the capacity and readiness of the Communications Branch and regions to implement *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications*; and
4. assess efficiency and effectiveness of the function, identifying areas for improvement or expansion to meet foreseeable demands with some flexibility, within reasonable limits, to allow for the unforeseeable.

The current structure of the function

The Communications Function in the Department does not operate as a single entity but is made up of many parts; however, the organizational structure of the Department creates challenges for the function to work as a whole. As such, the Head of Communications (i.e. the Director General (DG) of Communications) does not manage the Function, as the Communications Policy requires.

Among Communications clients, there is no clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities that Communications staff can play in the sectors' communications planning for their programs, initiatives and activities. Sectors are unclear as to what processes should involve the expertise of the Communications Branch and regional Communications Directorates. This lack of clarity also affects the level of understanding between Communications staff at NHQ and the regions and between staff in the Operations and Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Directorates at NHQ. Further, interviewees indicated that NHQ Communications staff and regional staff are unaware of the daily challenges that their Communications colleagues face and the national and regional priorities of the Communications function are not clearly understood. At NHQ, staff turnover and limited information sharing has led to a disconnect between the two directorates.

The Department has not integrated the consideration of communications impact into its internal planning or development processes. The organizational structure works against the development of consistent management practices, such as common policy and planning systems as some communications activities take place outside the Communications Branch.

The current state of affairs of Communications at NHQ and in the regions

Interviewees reported that workloads in NHQ Communications and in the regions are at full capacity. This is particularly so for those involved in issues-management/media relations activities. Because of the nature of certain portfolios (e.g. Fisheries Management, Coast Guard), there is not an equal distribution of workload among communications staff.

The communications function is a shared responsibility that requires the support, cooperation and interaction of various personnel throughout the Department. In some instances, it is not clear where the responsibility for certain communications activities should rest; for example public outreach, public education and some client consultations.

Presently, each program area is involved, to varying degrees, in delivering communications activities. Communications activities are being carried out within the Sectors, independent of the Communications Branch at NHQ and regional directorates, in areas such as outreach, education, public awareness and internal communications. In accordance with the *Communications Policy*

of the Government of Canada, the Head of Communications should be consulted on all activities and initiatives involving communications with the public or which have an implication for a department's internal communications. This consultation does not always take place between communications and the sectors. The cost of these sector-related communications activities could not be readily identified as they are often included as part of regular program costs.

Clients are satisfied with the quality of work from the NHQ Communications and regional Communications Directorates. While they understand why the bulk of this work is reactive in nature, based on existing resource levels, there is a desire for a more proactive, strategic approach to Departmental communications. Interviewees suggest there are insufficient human resources in NHQ and/or in the Regional Directorates to successfully implement *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications.*

Capacity and readiness to implement *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications*

General strategic capacity is missing in NHQ and in the regions. According to interviewees, there appears to be some level of strategic communications competency; however, strategic capability is not there. High turnover and low retention rates in certain units acerbate the problem. A long-term lack of orientation, mentoring and training programs is another problem. The strategic capacity needed to successfully implement the document *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* is not there. Generally, based on the information gathered, it can be said that staff members are not in a position to implement this new approach.

Efficiency and effectiveness

Clients believe the Function provides 'reactive communications' effectively and efficiently. They understand that it is being conducted with limited resources. They believe it is well-done. They understand there are no additional resources within the NHQ Communications and regional Communications Directorates for proactive, strategic communications. Clients believe there would be a positive payoff in the future if more resources were devoted to the implementation of proactive, strategic communications activities; however, some expressed concern at their own ability to match a more planned, strategic approach to communications. There may be duplication of some services (e.g. publishing, distribution) across the Communications Function and if corrected, may lead to the freeing up of resources. This duplication could be taking place between the sectors and the Communications Branch as well as between regions where similar communications tools are being produced. Potential duplicate services were perceived to be in the sectors; however, the resources allocated to these activities could not be quantified during the review.

In order to ensure a more strategic approach to communications, DFO must ensure the function meets the requirements of the new GOC Communications Policy (particularly requirements pertaining to roles of the Deputy Minister and Head of Communications, to the acceptance of the Function concept with all communications activities coordinated under the leadership of the DG, Communications, to the integration of common communication policy, planning and management systems, and to the adequacy of resource levels). It is important that the Head of Communications clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Function to all departmental staff.

The Department must address retention and capacity issues and examine its human resources management practices for the Function.

Recommendations

To assist the Department in implementing *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications*, and to move towards full compliance with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, the following recommendations are offered:

It is recommended that:

1)   **in order to fully implement and meet the requirements of the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* and to strengthen functional authority, the Director General of Communications should develop a strategy to actively communicate the roles, responsibilities and services of the communications function to departmental communications staff and clients;**

2)   **the Director General of Communications ensure that a Strategic Communications Plan has strong linkages to departmental policy and program development to make sure that all potential impacts of policy frameworks are known and associated costs for communication requirements are identified;**

3)   **the Director General of Communications receive a comprehensive inventory, on a quarterly basis, of all planned outreach activities being currently undertaken by the Sectors so that Communications can determine the associated support required for each of these activities;**

4)   **the Director General of Communications establish a mechanism whereby all communications publications are approved and signed-off by the Director General, Communications or by the Directors of the regional Communications Directorates;**

5)   **all Communications Officers be assessed against a required set of core competencies for communications professionals, gaps identified and a learning plan developed to address these gaps. A mentoring and training program geared towards building strategic capacity could support this initiative;**

6)   **the Director General of Communications prepare and maintain an inventory of all communications materials, products and published information in all formats at NHQ and the regions;**

7)   **the Director General of Communications review the current approvals process and establish procedures and protocols which will enable communication products to be approved and released within a shorter timeframe without sacrificing quality;**

8)   **the Director General of Communications develop an approach to measure the workload of Communications staff to ensure that work is evenly distributed and resources are appropriately utilized; and**

9)   **an assessment be made of the extent to which the requirements of** *the Government of Canada Communications Policy* **are being fulfilled by the Communications Function. The gaps in compliance with the** *Policy* **should be identified and a plan put in place to address the areas of non-compliance.**

II MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN	INITIAL TARGET DATE

To assist the Department in implementing *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications*, and to move towards full compliance with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, the following recommendations are offered:
 	
1. It is recommended that in order to fully implement and meet the requirements of the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* and to strengthen functional authority, the Director General of Communications should develop a strategy to actively communicate the roles, responsibilities and services of the communications function to departmental communications staff and clients.
	Phase I
	1. Continue to implement the Strategic Approach:
	  1. Seek the entrenchment of communications planning within Business Planning process (working closely with Policy Sector).
	  2. Finalize Communications charter (NHQ and Regions).
	  3. Implement Service Level Agreements with Regional Director Generals.
	  4. Draft service agreements with ADMs.
	  5. Maintain Operational Communications plans as necessary (Business Planning process to determine).
	  6. Begin development of a Communications Performance Measurement Framework.
	  7. Seek approval for the proposed Internal Communications Strategy.
	Phase II
	  a. Begin implementation of the Internal Communications strategy as possible. Specifically relevant to this recommendation are:
	    1. Information sessions about Communications to Sectors.
	    2. Improvements to Communications intranet sites.
	    3. Internal communications strategies (for NHQ and Regional Communications branches).
		Phase I - by end of fiscal 2003/2004.
		
		Phase II - 2004/2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN	INITIAL TARGET DATE
	4. Enhanced involvement of NAC to test ideas/needs, gauge awareness and understanding. b. Review and update Service Standards Agreement. c. Review and assess progress.	

It is recommended that the Director General of Communications:
  2. ensures that a departmental Strategic Communications plan has strong linkages to departmental policy and program development to make sure that all potential impacts of policy frameworks are known and associated costs for communication requirements are identified.
	Phase I
	  1. Continue with the implementation of the Strategic Approach:
	    1. Improve, in collaboration with Executive Secretariat and Policy Sector, the integration of Communications within DFO (i.e., "Communications Impact" form; entrenching Communications within Business Planning process; etc.).
	    2. Engage in Policy's lead on the new strategic directions/priorities of DFO (providing such input as media context, public environment and proposed methods of communication).
	    3. Coordinate strategic communications planning workouts with Sectors (in collaboration with Policy Sector) as appropriate.
	Phase II
	  1. Implementation of departmental Internal Communications Strategy (as described in Recommendation #1).
	Phase III
	  1. Ongoing business planning process.
		Phase I – by end of 2003/2004.
		
		Phase II - 2005/2006
		Phase III - ongoing

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN	INITIAL TARGET DATE
3. the Director General of Communications receive a comprehensive inventory, on a quarterly basis, of all planned outreach activities being currently undertaken by the Sectors so that Communications can determine the associated support required for each of these activities;	*Phase I* 1. *Work with sectors to define relevant activities and process of generating inventory.* 2. *In close partnership with Regional Directors of Communication, DG issues quarterly call out to DMC members. Overlap with recommendations #6.* *Phase II* 1. *Use the findings to inform annual planning efforts (i.e., Business Planning process, HR planning, Service Level Agreements, accountability accords, PMF).* 2. *Assess against DFO corporate priorities, DFO communications policy and Communication Canada Policy.* *Phase III* 1. *Provide regular analysis/updates to DMC.*	Phase I - 2004/2005 Phase II – 2005/2006 Phase III - ongoing
4. the Director General of Communications establish a mechanism whereby all communications publications are approved and signed-off by the Director General, Communications or by the Directors of the regional Communications Directorates;	*Phase I* 1. *Continue to implement the Strategic Approach. Relevant items include:* 1. *Publishing Policy (approvals process).* 2. *Sector/Regional Service Agreements (roles and responsibilities).* 3. *See recommendation #7* *Phase II* 1. *Examine the possibility/practicality of a national communications committee.*	Phase I – 2003/2004 Phase II – 2004/2005
5. all Communications Officers be assessed against a required set of core competencies for communications professionals, gaps identified and a learning plan developed to address these gaps. A mentoring and training program geared towards building strategic capacity could support this initiative.	*Phase I* 1. *Work to ensure annual training plans identify opportunities to enhance competencies.* 2. *Examine the possibility of establishing a working group within Communications (managers and employees) with the assistance of HR to develop/define competencies, action plan and measures for success.* 1. *Reflect Communications Charter.* *Work with Communications Community to build on existing models/best practices, confirm standards, etc. for appropriate training levels..*	Phase I – 2004/2005 Phase II – 2005/2006

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN	INITIAL TARGET DATE
	Phase II 1. *Explore possibilities of other training methods (i.e., mentorship program to assist career planning).* 2. *Implement working group action plan as possible*	

6. prepare and maintain an inventory of all communications materials, products and published information in all formats at NHQ and the regions.	*Phase I*
	1. *Continue to implement Strategic Approach:*
	    1. *Seek DMC approval of Web Development project (November 2003) and establish action plan. ACCESS DFO to coordinate inventory.*
	Phase II
	1. *Begin implementation of Publishing Policy action plan.*
	    1. *Expand online access to inventory list.*
		Phase I – 2003/2004
		
		Phase II – 2004/2005 to 2005/2006

7. review the current approvals process and procedures and protocols which will enable communication products to be approved and released within a shorter timeframe without sacrificing quality.	*Phase I* 1. *Review existing approvals process for areas of improvement and develop action plan for implementation with consensus of Sectors/Regions.* *Phase II* 1. *Initiate discussions with key Sectors to ensure understanding of roles and responsibilities, opportunities for improvements (i.e., Legal Services, Executive Secretariat, Review Directorate).* 2. *Propose refinements to existing processes, procedures and protocols. Develop action plan for short and long-term enhancements.* 3. *Improve use of technology to increase access to electronic version of final documents.* 4. *Initiate implementation of Media Strategy as described in the Strategic Approach.* *Phase III* 1. *Implement longer-term refinements to formal processes.* 2. *Establish regular process of review.*	Phase I – 2003/2004 Phase II – 2004/2005 Phase III – 2005/2006

	RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN	INITIAL TARGET DATE
8.	develop an approach to measure the workload of Communications staff to ensure that work is evenly distributed and resources are appropriately utilized.	*Ongoing* 1. *Management concern to be addressed in HR planning and annual reviews.* 2. *Newly established Working Group within Communications (recommendation #4) to provide a forum for discussion and advice.*	ONGOING (REGULAR REVIEWS)
9.	an assessment be made of the extent to which the requirements of the *Government of Canada Communications Policy* are being fulfilled by the Communications Function. The gaps in compliance with the Policy should be identified and a plan put in place to address the areas of non-compliance.	*Phase I* 1. *Continue with implementation of Strategic Approach:* 　1. *Draft and gain consensus for Performance Measurement framework, using Communications Policy as guide.* *Phase II* 1. *Working in partnership with the Review Directorate, complete the gap analysis of DFO practices against GoC Policy as started by Functional Review Process.* 2. *Implement framework* 3. *Establish objectives for annual progress.*	PHASE I – 2004/2005 Phase II – 2005/2006+

Action Plan to be reviewed in partnership with Review Directorate and scheduled updates to DRC members.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) plays a leading role in managing and safeguarding oceans and inland waters and their resources for Canadians. It is committed to ensuring safe, healthy, productive waters and aquatic ecosystems for the benefit of present and future generations. It advances these goals by maintaining the highest possible standards of service to Canadians in the areas of sustainable development, environmental stewardship and public safety.

DFO is a large, decentralized, federal department of approximately 10,000 employees that delivers services throughout Canada from six regions and National Headquarters (NHQ) in Ottawa. DFO operates under the authority of 15 separate Acts and 39 sets of Regulations. The departmental budget in the 2002-03 Main Estimates is over $1.4 billion.

The Department enjoys a high level of visibility through the activities of its Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) personnel, Fisheries Officers, scientists, and other staff located in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic coastal communities, as well as on the Great Lakes and the Mackenzie River, and other inland waters.

In pursuit of its mandate, DFO is committed to five strategic outcomes - the long-term and enduring benefits that Canadians derive from the Department's vision and efforts. These outcomes describe the difference the Department is mandated to make and usually require the combined resources and sustained effort of many partners over a long period of time. The strategic outcomes are:

- management and protection of fisheries resources;
- protection of the marine and freshwater environment;
- understanding of the oceans and aquatic resources;
- maritime safety; and
- maritime commerce and ocean development.

DFO's Communications Function plays an integral part in contributing to the achievement of the Department's goals and delivery of its mandate. With resources of $4.8M and 99 staff members, the Communications function works with 0.3 % of the Department's overall budget.

The function of the Communications Branch is to inform DFO client groups, including staff and the public at large, of the department's policies, programs, services and activities; to develop communications strategies; to provide advice on the communication of ministerial and departmental policies, programs and initiatives; and to provide a collection of communications services for the department.

In recent years, significant changes in the nature of the department's activities and mandate (CCG, Oceans), and its roles and responsibilities towards its clients have occurred. These shifts have resulted in significant reactions within the public environment and have placed heavy demands on the communications function.

The advent of horizontality across government and of the new Government of Canada (GOC) Communications Policy, as well as the continuing importance of strong communications efforts in achieving corporate – and indeed federal – objectives have also tested DFO Communications' capacity.

In March 2003, the Departmental Management Committee (DMC) approved a new direction, *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* in DFO. It is generally believed that communications in the Department is primarily issue and media based, is reactive, driven by the need to respond; in essence, not able to implement a more planned, strategic approach. The Approach identified a series of tactics with the cumulative objective to enable coordinated, strategic communications within the Department (recognizing the need to address many of the concerns raised in this document, such as increasing the coordination of horizontal efforts). These tactical measures are to ensure Communication's ability to effectively communicate the new strategic direction of DFO.

The new Approach is to move from a primarily reactive function to one including a proactive role, from the tactical to the strategic and to be more fully integrated, coordinated and planned. *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* requires that the existing Communications capacity be assessed in order to "develop the foundation… to communicate the 'DFO story' and properly position the department with staff, the public and stakeholders."

The Departmental Assessment and Alignment Project (DAAP) undertook a baseline resource review, the results of which are being incorporated into the overall DAAP report. Communications is one of the enabling functions included in the Program Enablers table and is playing a vital role in identifying challenges and proposing initiatives to increase efficiency and/or to generate savings for the department. The results of DAAP related to Communications including the creation of a single toll-free line for DFO, electronic-only internal publications and the renewal web presence are not yet available and therefore are not included in this report.

1.2. REVIEW OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project were to:

1. examine the current structure of the corporate communications function in headquarters and the regions in the context of their stated mandate, client expectations and demand, and benchmarks;
2. review the current state of affairs in the Communications Branch and in the regions including roles, responsibilities and processes;
3. determine the capacity and readiness of the Communications Branch and regions to implement *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications*; and
4. assess efficiency and effectiveness of the function, identifying areas for improvement or expansion to meet foreseeable demands with some flexibility, within reasonable limits, to allow for the unforeseeable.

1.3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The scope of the review encompassed communications activities carried out by Communications and sectors staff at NHQ and all six regions. The methodology of this review consisted of documentation review plus interviews with NHQ and regional staff. Interviews and discussions were held with more than 100 staff members (including the Associate Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Ministers and Regional Directors General). Interviews were also conducted with officials of the Privy Council Office (PCO). The table below shows the number of individuals interviewed by region.

INTERVIEWEES

REGIONS	ADMs/RDGs	DGs AND DIRECTORS	COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORS AND STAFF
Headquarters	9	3	11
Central and Arctic	-	5	5
Gulf	1	3	6
Maritimes	1	4	8
Newfoundland & Labrador	1	9	8
Pacific	-	9	7
Quebec	1	4	4
OTHER			
PCO			2
Minister's Office			3
TOTAL	**13**	**37**	**54**

TOTAL = 104

2.0. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. CURRENT STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION IN NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS AND IN THE REGIONS

The Communications Function in the Department is comprised of the Communications Branch at NHQ, headed by a Director General (DG) and directorates in each of the six regions headed by a Regional Director of Communications. The current management structure in DFO has each Regional Director of Communications reporting directly to the Regional Director General (RDG) and functionally to the DG of Communications at NHQ. The DG of Communications reports to the Deputy Minister and is a member of the Departmental Management Committee (DMC). Communications has close operational links to other key enabling sectors such as Human Resources, the Executive Secretariat and Legal Services.

Headquarters

The Communications Branch at NHQ is headed by a DG and two Directors; one responsible for Public Affairs and Strategic Communications, and the other for Operations. The Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Directorate is organized by sector with each client advisor providing advice, planning and issues management services to the sector. This is accomplished through regular meetings to discuss communications objectives and the selection of appropriate strategies/plans (short and long-term) and products (lines, news releases and brochures). These strategies and products are prepared for target audiences internal and external to the Department. Public Affairs and Strategic Communications staff are also responsible for providing written assessments of the communications implications and opportunities for recommendations put forward in memoranda to the Minister. A media relations unit is also in this directorate to identify emerging issues, liaise directly with the offices of the Deputy Minister and Minister, participate in the Question Period process and in general to complement the issues-management work.

The Operations Directorate is organized by service line and is responsible for the internal communications needs of the Department. It provides support services to the Minister and has a direct relationship with clients. One of their main services is to provide media clippings to the Department. News articles related to the Department are collected and distributed electronically to the Minister, Deputy Minister and all interested managers. These clippings provide senior management with a daily snapshot of the department's standing within the public domain. Operations also includes a number of other groups such as Web; Creative Services; Writing/Editing; Strategic Initiative; Internal Communications and Finance and Administration. The Operations Directorate also works directly with Human Resources in particular and has ad hoc involvement from Public Affairs and Strategic Communications.

Regions

The Communications Directorates in most regions are structured along a sector approach with a Communications Manager assigned to a particular sector in each region to provide support services. In addition to providing communications support to the sectors, there are also communications staff assigned to internal communications and other services such as the web and media analysis.

Recently, the Newfoundland Region has implemented a new organizational structure and changed its approach to delivering communications services in that region. Under the new organizational structure, the branch is aligned into two functional teams: Corporate Communications/Public Education and Media Relations/Issues-Management.

The Corporate Communications and Public Education team will oversee strategic and business planning, public education initiatives, events, editorial services, public inquiries as well as internal editorial processes and information management. The Media Relations and Issues-management team will focus on media relations and external issues, media events and training, external editorial services, and serve as a point of contact for the media.

All other regions are still structured as previously described; however, in the Central and Arctic Region, the Communications Directorate, although structured along sectors lines, is adjusted to meet the geographic diversities of the region. For example, the Communications Manager in Burlington may have responsibilities for Habitat in Ontario but because of the location must also assume responsibility for Small Craft Harbours and other corporate functions.

DFO operates as a very decentralized organization. Not only is the Department decentralized from a NHQ/regional perspective, but also within each region there is a great deal of decentralization. Each region is further divided into Area Offices and district offices from which it manages its operation. In addition, some regions have science facilities outside of the regional headquarters locations.   With some exceptions, the Communications function is not decentralized beyond the regional office level. This has an impact on the level of service provided to those clients located outside of the regional headquarters areas. Where communications staff are located outside of the regional headquarters, there seemed to be more satisfaction with the services being provided.

During the review, there was a change in the reporting relationship of the CCG, with the regional branches now reporting directly to the Commissioner of the CCG. The impact of this change on the Communications Function was not assessed during the review.

The number of staff and classification level of the positions in the Communications Branch at NHQ and in the regional Communications Directorates is as follows:

REGIONS	NUMBER OF STAFF AND CLASSIFICATION LEVEL								
	EX 03	EX 01	IS 06	IS 05	IS 04	IS 03	IS 02	IS 01	Other
Headquarters	1	2	4	10	4	6	2	1	14
Central and Arctic			1		2	1			2
Gulf				1	4				2
Maritimes		1		1	6				2
Newfoundland and Labrador			1		3	4			2
Pacific		1			3	3			4
Quebec		1			5	3			2
Total	**1**	**5**	**6**	**12**	**27**	**17**	**2**	**1**	**28**

TOTAL = 99

Roles and Responsibilities

Interviews with Communications clients at NHQ and in the regions revealed confusion and a lack of clarity over the mandate of the Communications Branch and regional directorates and the roles and responsibilities of key players involved in the communications process. In order to be effective, the mandate of the Communications Branch and regional directorates must be clearly articulated, and the roles of the departmental communications staff in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of communications activities must be clearly understood and delineated.

Despite the fact that NHQ and most regions have a similar sectoral approach to delivering communications, some interviewees reported a strained working relationship between NHQ and the regions. This issue seems to be driven by two factors: a lack of understanding between NHQ and the regions and a lack of understanding about the corporate organizational structure for the Department. The Communications Branch at NHQ and the regional Communications Directorates do not fully understand what each other role is on a day-to-day basis. Neither has a good appreciation of the assigned roles, responsibilities and workload, the working conditions and the unique performance challenges of each other. While the DG, NHQ Directors and the Regional Directors tend to have a good working relationship and regular contact, at the working level the relationship appears to be less frequent and more ad hoc. If the relationship was more clearly understood, it might create a better understanding of each others' roles.

Further, perhaps due in part to the difference in roles and responsibilities, there is an apparent disconnect between Public Affairs and Strategic Communications and the Operations Directorates in the Communications Branch at NHQ. There is a limited understanding of each others' direction, workload, processes, and day-to-day challenges. This lack of understanding is fuelled by the recent high turnover of staff in Public Affairs and Strategic Communications. It appears that there is limited regularized sharing of information between these two directorates.

DFO's organizational structure has the Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs), the RDGs and the DG of Communications each reporting to the Deputy Minister. The Regional Directors of Communications report to the RDGs and they provide direct services to the sector Regional Directors as well as the Area Directors. The difficulty is in developing a unified approach to communications across the Department and in having a more strategic or strategy-based working relationship for the Communications Function as a whole.

Based on interviews with staff, it was noted that there is a lack of a common understanding of what functional direction means. This creates confusion and uncertainty over who is leading whom and who has authority for the communications decisions that affect NHQ and the regions. This is further clouded by the fact that the Sectors, both in NHQ and in the regions, are also involved in communications activities, sometimes without the involvement of the DG or Regional Directors of Communications. Some would argue that the activities the Sectors are undertaking are Sector-specific communications and should be therefore controlled by them.

The Communications Policy of the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of the sectors in delivering the communications function. The communications function is a shared responsibility that requires the support, cooperation and integration of various personnel throughout the Department; however, the head of communications must be consulted on all activities and initiatives involving communications. It should be clearly understood what the

activities are, the impacts they have on external issues to the specific sector involved and the cost associated with them. In some instances, it is not clear where the responsibility for certain communications activities should rest; for example public outreach, public education and some client consultations. The Executive Secretariat, formed after this review was well underway, will play a role in ensuring emerging issues are captured and information within the Department is coordinated in a way that meets the needs of the Deputy Minister and Minister's Offices.

Many "regional" issues have an impact on the national level and possible repercussions for the Minister. This creates conflict over who has the appropriate authority on a particular file and who should be taking the lead. It can also be a cause for embarrassment if an issue is handled at the regional level in isolation when it has national implications. There should be a clear understanding of who takes the lead on national /regional issues and more formalized criteria to make the decision.

Some of the issues identified above can be addressed by the Draft Communications Charter that is currently being developed by NHQ Communications. The draft charter sets out guiding principles for the function and clearly identifies national and regional roles and responsibilities by subject area such as Branch Function, Professional Development and Training, Policy guidelines and standards, Deputy Minister's and Minister's Office, Public Opinion Research, etc. This should help to clarify the roles and responsibilities of NHQ and regional communications with respect to carrying out the communications function within DFO.

If the status quo were to remain for the current organizational structure for communications, that is, NHQ Functional Authority over the regional Communications Directorates, then the delivery of communications support in the Department could be strengthened by clearly defining the meaning of Functional Authority and enhancing the mechanisms currently in place, such as continued weekly conference calls between regions and NHQ, NHQ/regional meetings, and more visibility by providing opportunities for NHQ staff to visit the regions and regional staff to visit NHQ.

The Communications Function in the Department does not operate as a single entity, but is made up of many parts. As such, the Head of Communications does not manage the Function as the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* requires. The Policy defines communications as a management function that is central to the work of government. Communications within the government is seen as a shared responsibility involving officials and employees at all levels. It calls for cooperation and coordination within, between and among the departments and agencies of the Government of Canada.

According to the Policy, the Communications Function, under the stewardship of the Head of Communications, includes the following:

- **Effective and Accountable Management:** Ensuring appropriate accountability and reporting mechanisms to Parliament and central agencies for the administration of all communication activities. Providing leadership, support and advice to ensure that communications are integrated in all phases of policy and program planning, development, implementation, marketing and management. Integrating corporate communication planning with annual business planning and budgeting cycles.

- **Values and Ethics:** Informing the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives in an accountable, non-partisan fashion consistent with the principles of Canadian parliamentary democracy and ministerial responsibility. Ensuring that the public trust and confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the Public Service of Canada are upheld.

- **Listening and Evaluating:** Researching and analyzing public issues and the public environment to help identify and assess the wants, needs and views of Canadians with respect to existing or proposed policies, programs, services and initiatives. Maintaining open communications with the public and developing proactive strategies for assessing and addressing public concerns.

- **Meeting Diverse Needs:** Preparing, producing and disseminating information using all forms of media and graphic arts, including electronic publishing. Recognizing the special needs of many Canadians, including literacy levels and perceptual or physical challenges, and designing and delivering communication tools to respond to those needs.

- **Outreach:** Applying marketing, citizen engagement and consultation techniques to foster citizen feedback or to enhance public access to, awareness and use of government policies, programs, services and initiatives. Building and maintaining effective relations with journalists and other communicators. Planning, coordinating and promoting the government's participation in public events, including fairs and exhibitions.

- **Corporate Identity and Visibility:** Applying the requirements of the *Federal Identity Program* in all presentations, and promoting a common look in all communication activities, to ensure accountability and public recognition of the Government of Canada. Reflecting key government themes and messages in information and communication materials so that overarching goals and the government's priorities for the country are consistently identified and communicated to the pubic and among employees.

It should be noted that the Corporate Strategic Approach addresses most of these issues, referring to them as necessary tactics to ensure it is able to support the communications needs of a renewed mandate and new corporate vision emanating from the DAAP. As such, the Corporate Strategic Approach could be seen as DFO's action plan to ensure the Department reflects federal priorities.

Interviewees expressed concern that Communications activities across the Department could be better coordinated or managed. The organizational structure works against the development of universal management practices, such as common policy and planning systems as some communications activities take place outside the Communications Branch. At the time of this review, it was noted that the DG of Communications, NHQ Directors and the Regional Directors had developed good working relationships. In an effort to carry out functional authority, the DG and NHQ Directors have regular contact with the Regional Directors by weekly conference calls. In addition, other vehicles are currently in place to share information amongst communications personnel about the general direction of the Department such as quarterly face-to-face meetings with Directors from NHQ and the regions and a national meeting once every two years with communications staff across the country. The quarterly meeting in May 2003, coincided with Communication Canada annual meeting that was open to communications staff from all

departments. This provided an opportunity for some regional officers, in addition to managers and Directors, to attend the DFO quarterly meeting. Although some initiatives have been undertaken to enhance functional authority, communications work is not fully structured in an integrated manner and, as a result, is not totally managed by the Head of Communications. As such, the current method of organizing communications in the Department is a barrier to the successful implementation of *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* and in complying with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada.*

Recommendation

1) **It is recommended that in order to fully implement and meet the requirements of the** *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* **and to strengthen functional authority, the Director General of Communications should develop a strategy to actively communicate the roles, responsibilities and services of the communications function to departmental communications staff and clients.**

2.2. CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Crisis Management

The Communications Function in the Department operates in a reactive mode responding to crises that may arise on a daily basis. With the exception of some of the work being done in Internal Communications, Communications staff and clients both suggest that the range of products and services as well as service levels are at a bare minimum, that much more could be done. The Communications Branch at NHQ and the regional Communications Directorates say they are rarely able to go beyond reacting to the issue of the day as they seldom have the time and resources to be proactive.

Though client satisfaction with communication products, services and advice has not been formally evaluated, both communication staff members and their clients believe there is a good level of satisfaction with what is now being provided. Clients are satisfied with communications officers' ability to manage issues, deal with the media and conduct the very limited amount of proactive communications they do now. Without exception, internal clients expressed a high level of satisfaction with speech writing services. Clients appreciated the comprehensive and strategic perspective of the products received from speech writing and held the function in the highest regard.

Both communication staff members and their clients state a desire to be more strategic and more proactive in communications activities. Clients also state a need for high-level strategic thinking from their communication advisors. Both agree that the Communications Function will not become more strategic and proactive without a strong Departmental Strategic Plan and commitment to implement it. The Department's Strategic Plan, *Moving Toward Confidence and Credibility"* (March 2000), makes the following statement:

"Restoring confidence and credibility, whether internally or externally, implies a new and enhanced role for communications – a critical horizontal function – in the Department. Work must begin now to prepare stakeholders for change, advance public understanding of the issues, and promote environmental stewardship, safety, sustainable use and conservation."

The March 2000 strategic plan also identified a number of elements for Communications within DFO of the Future:

- Core function
- Create participatory culture
- Foster public understanding and values
- Highlight success

While some initiatives have taken place, for example Access DFO, little has changed for the Communications Function in DFO since the strategic planning document was completed in March 2000 and a similar role is still being advocated today for the Departmental Communications Function.

A strategic communications plan would only be meaningful if tied to a corporate strategy and plan, with strong linkages to Departmental policies both in identifying potential impacts and appropriate communication strategies to address the impacts. The development of a strategic communications plan also requires linkages to the department's business planning process and value added participation in Shadow Policy and on departmental working groups. Ambiguity, created by the lack of clearly articulated policy frameworks for new initiatives, stimulates expectations among stakeholders that could create undue pressure for the Department and the Minister.

Workload

While most communication staff, at both NHQ and in the regions, report that their own workload is just manageable (heavy overall with very heavy peaks and less heavy valleys across the course of the year), all report that there are few opportunities for shifting priorities, reassigning files or sharing work when an individual's workload is extremely heavy or when that individual is away on sick leave, annual leave or training. While the sector approach has its benefits, it can create a situation where a person or unit is extremely busy and working overtime when a nearby individual or unit is less than busy. Whether between account individuals/teams at NHQ or in the regions, between Public Affairs and Strategic Communications and Operations, between Operational units, between regions or between regional Communications Directorates and the Communications Branch, there is the inability to share resources. Primarily, the issue is employee back-up. For the most part, when someone is extremely busy or away from the office, the lack of back-up limits the Function's effectiveness.

Planning

The Department does not have a coordinated system of communication planning. Sector and regional plans are not fully integrated. Current communication planning is seen as being less than strategic. Environmental scanning, strategic thinking and proactive strategy development are areas that are not as evident as they could be across the Function. Some regions (e.g.

Maritimes and Quebec) have put in place annual communications plans that identify their communications activities in conjunction with the programs, which is an improvement over past years. The draft Communications Charter mentioned previously also provides for increased participation of Communications in the preparations of operational plans. Shortly after this Review was underway, regions and sector operational plans were drafted.

Policies and Procedures

While there are policies already in place under the umbrella of the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, such as the Federal Identity Program and Official Languages guidelines, they are not well known and have not been applied consistently in the Department. As well, the Department lacks its own integrated set of communication policies and procedures. Some regions have taken the initiative to put in place some policies and procedures on a primarily piecemeal basis; however, this leads to inconsistencies and duplication in developing policies. The Central and Arctic Region has developed a detailed set of procedures that could be used as the basis for developing a set of regional procedures. NHQ is also in the process of developing policies that will assist the operations of the function. DMC has approved a National Communications Policy in addition to policies on media relations, publishing, and advertising. The drafting of a web development policy is currently in progress.

The existing policies and procedures could be built upon and clearly define objectives, roles and responsibilities, accountabilities and communications procedures. Documented policies and procedures would not only be of use to communications staff but would also be a tool for informing clients of exactly what the Communications Function is able to do for them. Such a document could also serve as the basis for discussion when entering into Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the clients to provide them with service for which communications may not have the resources to provide but the client does.

Sector Communications

Communications is a shared responsibility that requires the support, cooperation and interaction of various personnel throughout the Department. Presently, each program area is involved, to varying degrees, in delivering communications activities. Communications activities are being carried out within the Sectors, independent of the Communications Branch at NHQ and regional directorates, in areas such as outreach, education, public awareness and internal communications. In accordance with the *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada,* the Head of Communications should be consulted on all activities and initiatives involving communications with the public or which have an implication for a department's internal communications. This consultation does not always take place between communications and the sectors. The cost of these sector-related communications activities could not be readily identified as they are often included as part of regular program costs. While most clients agreed that assistance from communications staff on sector communications projects would be appreciated, they are reluctant to turn over any resources to communications to have them undertake these activities on their behalf.

The personnel in some sectors carrying out communications activities in public outreach and education are not generally trained communications officers and might not have the skills and competencies that can be found in a communications unit, but are the subject-matter experts in

their program areas. Sectors are also producing a variety of related publications for use by the media, public and schools. Having sectors conduct their own communications activities can lead to inconsistencies or non-compliance with government policies. To ensure congruence with other communication activities, the head of communications, or his or her designate, must review marketing plans and strategies before they are implemented. Like other communications activities, the design and implementation of marketing initiatives must conform to the requirements of the *Federal Identity Program*, the *Official Languages Act,* Treasury Board's *Official Language Policies* and its *Common Look and Feel for the Internet: Standards and Guidelines*. As well, sectors may be carrying out similar communications activities in different regions and developing similar tools leading to duplications and inefficiencies.

Clients are satisfied with the quality of work from the Communications Branch and regional Communications Directorates. While communications staff understand why the bulk of this work is reactive in nature, they desire to counterbalance the reactive with a more proactive, strategic approach to department communications. It is the opinion of the review team that the Communications Function would be better served if all communications activities were managed through the Head of Communications and all relevant costs incurred by the sectors identified. Communications is a shared responsibility and the sectors would continue to play an important role in delivering departmental communications. The sector staff are the experts in their field and would contribute, in conjunction with communications staff, to the content and material required for producing communications products and services. Those products and services would be jointly approved by the sector and Communications who would also provide quality assurance prior to materials being issued to the public.

To ensure that the sectors receive the appropriate level of service from the Communications function, SLAs could be entered into between the DG of Communications and the ADMs and between the Regional Directors, Communications and the Regional Program Directors. Since this Review was started SLAs were initiated with each region, as requested by the Deputy Minister and based on the established charter. Communications was advised that SLAs in year two would reflect Communications in each sector.

DFO managers at all levels are responsible for communicating internally and externally. If the Sectors are to continue on with promoting DFO's policies, programs, services, and initiatives to the public, then communication activities such as outreach, carried out by the Sectors, independent of the Communications Branch or regional Communications Directorates, will need to be more aggressively monitored to ensure that all programs in headquarters and the regions are aware of its importance.

If the Communications Branch is to be proactive in its approach in delivering the Department's messages, there must be a joint effort by Communications and the Sectors to ensure that Communications is aware of any new departmental initiatives or directions on a timely basis with adequate resources in place. Too often communications issues arise when new policies are developed and put in place. The role that communications plays in the policy exercise should be clear so that the proper messages are relayed to the stakeholders. In addition, early engagement of communications staff in policy development initiatives would significantly strengthen DFO's

ability to successfully manage key issues. As well, Communications should be aware and involved in any new initiatives where there is a distinct need for strategic advice. These new initiatives should include adequate funding for the communications requirements (e.g. inclusion in the TB Submission).

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Director General of Communications:

2)   **ensure that a Strategic Communications Plan has strong linkages to departmental policy and program development to make sure that all potential impacts of policy frameworks are known and associated costs for communication requirements are identified;**

3)   **receive a comprehensive inventory, on a quarterly basis, of all planned outreach activities being currently undertaken by the Sectors so that Communications can determine the associated support required for each of these activities; and**

4)   **establish a mechanism whereby all communications publications are approved and signed-off by the Director General, Communications or by the Directors of the regional Communications Directorates.**

2.3. CAPACITY AND READINESS

Based on the results of the interviews with no formal measures in place, it appears that all Communications staff are at or very near their full capacity with their existing workloads. This is particularly true for some staff that are responsible for sectors like Fisheries Management where the "hot issues" always seem to surface. Some interviewees from outside of the Department stated that it was "the same people on the high profile files" and that "there were too few people on too many hot files." Generally, it can be said that the issues-management capacity of the Department, both at NHQ and in the regions, is working at capacity, if not beyond. Overall, most if not all regional offices, run at full capacity most times. There are some valleys in all workloads. Staff could take greater advantage of these 'valleys' to undertake a more regularized approach to proactive, integrated tasks such as environmental scanning, assessing public needs and expectations and to anticipate issues that may arise and to be able to formulate appropriate response strategies in advance.

If the directorates continue in the same mode of reactive operations, there is little available capacity to dramatically increase the product and service offerings or to allow branches to conduct proactive communications activities. A number of interviewees in the Sectors also suggested that even if Communications were to become more proactive and strategic, the Sectors themselves may not have the capacity to respond. Some of those interviewed suggest that while most communications staff members are seen as competent in what they do now, they believe a strategic capability is missing. A number of reasons were suggested as to why the Function is not strategic and proactive. Strategic capability is perceived to come from two strengths: a high level of expertise in communication planning, issues-management, and strategic thinking; and a high degree of experience with fisheries issues and with issues-management and communication around the Federal Government.

Turnover and staff retention issues can also contribute to weakening communications capability. At NHQ, the Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Directorate recently experienced very high turnover. This turnover of advisors is frustrating to clients in NHQ, to regional clients and to regional communications officers with whom they interact on specific files. Retention of experienced and expert issues-management file specialists at NHQ is an issue more so than in the regions. The review team was told that turnover of communications staff in the National Capital Region is a common occurrence for most departments. Nevertheless, it does not ease the impact it has on the organization. Further study may be required to determine if this is common within the federal government communications function as some suggest. If so, models or best practices may exist to help alleviate the problem.

Reaction to the document *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* was generally positive; however, most stated they could not see it being implemented within existing resources or within the way those resources are currently utilized. The Function does not have the extra capacity to implement the approach outlined in the document.

There is evidence to suggest that it may be easier to implement this new approach to communications at NHQ than in the Regions, if the new approach is based on some of the better practices found in other departments. While both NHQ and regional communications staff members currently average about six to seven years of service with DFO, NHQ communications staff average approximately thirteen years in communications in the Federal Government. On the other hand, regional communications staff only average eight years. That is, on average, communications staff members in Ottawa have spent about half their career in other departments. In the Regions, 90% of the average career has been spent with DFO. This suggests that it may be easier to obtain buy-in to change if that change reflects best practices experienced in other departments. Regional staff members have little experience beyond DFO while their counterparts in Ottawa have a wider-range of departmental experiences.

Training is seen as a key element if a strategic approach to communications is to be implemented. While most people interviewed indicated having the standard-type training available to them, many expressed a desire for professional development courses geared specifically to communications. Employees were realistic in their demands for training, recognizing resource limitations. They indicated that they were not denied training but would be hesitant to request the training knowing that the money was not in the budget. Communications staff is missing out on opportunities to broaden their experiences by not attending communications training with their counterparts from other communications organizations. In addition to training, some type of mentoring or sharing of experiences and best practices among employees, particularly between those in the regions and HQ who have previously worked in other federal departments, would also be beneficial.

Interviewees suggest that general strategic capacity is missing in the Communications Function. While a number of staff members are perceived to have strategic competencies, others are lacking this skill. In certain units, high turnover and low retention rates acerbate the problem. A lack of orientation and long-term mentoring and training programs within Communications is another problem. The strategic capacity needed to successfully implement *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* is not there. Based on the results of our interviews, it can be said that staff members are not ready to implement this new approach.

Recommendation

5)   **It is recommended that all Communications Officers be assessed against a required set of core competencies for communications professionals, gaps identified and a learning plan developed to address these gaps. A mentoring and training program geared towards building strategic capacity could support this initiative.**

2.4. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

O&M Allocations

The process for allocating funds to the Communications Directorates in the regions was inconsistent. In the Quebec Region, each sector was "taxed" at the beginning of the fiscal year for their communications requirements and plans were established based on this funding. In the Central and Arctic Region, funds seemed to be allocated to Communications in some Area Offices but this was not consistent within the region. Generally, in the regions, it was noted that they were provided with a budget for their salaries and other O&M needs and if Communications were required to do something special for the sectors then the sectors would pay for it. These inconsistencies made it difficult to compare resources allocated to the communications function in the regions.

Interviewees, both from NHQ and the regions, state that there is not enough money allocated to provide the additional communication products and services needed to make Departmental communications more effective. Current O&M expenditures support limited, basic, reactive communications. There is a general feeling that more could be done in terms of strategic, proactive communication, if there were more resources available for operational spending. Resources within Communications are adequate for media relations and issues-management but not for outreach, public education, marketing, promotion or information programs. It was noted that when a crisis hits, communications is overburdened immediately and everything is thrown into a reactionary response mode; the issue then subsides and Communications seem to become less visible until the next issue comes along. Clients believe that it is impossible to reallocate resources from other areas and would be reluctant to transfer program money to communications. The vast majority of interviewees feel that the Communications Function does not have adequate O&M resourcing, that investing in strategic/proactive communication is required. They agree that there would be a positive payoff for the Department if more money was given for communications but they do not know where it will come from.

Given the resources it currently has and the reactive mode in which it operates, the communications function is using its resources in a cost-effective manner.

Duplication

The Department devotes resources within and outside of the Communications Function to web and print publishing, print product distribution and public inquiries. These operations are not coordinated nor are they integrated. From interviews with staff, it became clear that there are sectors in NHQ and the regions doing communications type work that is not coordinated with NHQ Communications and regional Communications Directorates. In addition, there is no centralized function for public education materials, brochures, videos, etc. Products that have

been developed separately could be shared with other regions to avoid duplication. While those operations have not been studied in detail, there is the appearance of duplication of services and thus, an issue of inefficiency. A central inventory of all products and services produced could assist in identifying those duplications and inefficiencies.

Approval Process

The Department's approval process for communication products and services was raised by most individuals interviewed. Procedures are currently in place to ensure Sector and Communications approval before communication products such as news releases, communication plans, backgrounders, media lines and letters to the editor are sent to the Deputy Minister's Office or Minister's Office for approvals. For example, at the regional level when the communications advisor has a final draft of a news release or any other document ready for approval, a blue approval form accompanies the document. While there is a fast track approvals process in place for a limited type of mundane news releases, there are up to seven levels of approvals [Program Officer, Program Director, Branch Director, Area Director, Regional Director of Communications, RDG and Minister's Office (name of person contacted)] generally required on the form before it is forwarded to NHQ. At NHQ, the regional news release is logged in the Communications Automated Tracking System, given a number for tracking purposes and then placed in a red docket for approval by the ADM of the relevant sector, DG Communications, and the Deputy Minister and the Minister's offices. In some cases, Legal Services has the opportunity for sign-off before it is sent on to the Deputy Minister and Minister's offices. Given that Communications staff may not have the expertise to determine what might constitute the need for Legal consultation, Legal Services has suggested that **all** products be sent to them as a part of the approvals process; however, since this has been a point of some discussion and concern about additional resource commitments and the potential for compromising a critical need for timeliness, this idea requires further study within the scope of a broader review of the Approvals process. Other Departments may have a model worth investigating. In the interim, the Communications Branch and Legal Services should continue with plans for information sharing sessions to ensure better understanding. The majority of interviewees at NHQ report that although the red docket system is effective in tracking approvals in the process, the number of approvals and the time taken to get approvals makes the system very inefficient. Likewise, the regionally-based interviewees take special issue with the process in Ottawa suggesting that it is cumbersome, unwieldy, too slow and a mystery. NHQ client expectations were not sought on the approvals of regional products.

One of the communication initiatives that have already been identified that will improve services and relationships with the regions is the establishment of an electronic approvals system. This has been identified as part of a web development proposal yet to be presented to DMC. The set up of this system will alleviate some of the concerns raised by the interviewees across the country with regards to the lengthy approval process.
While extending the fast track approvals has been identified as one possibility for change, the Communications Branch should also consider developing and implementing a service standard for the approval process. A service standard will include components such as a description of the service that will be provided, and where applicable, the benefits clients can expect to receive, a service pledge, timeframes and complaint and redress mechanisms. This will help Communications provide better service because it invites feedback from clients.

The review team noted that scientific publications such as stock assessment reports and hydrographic documents are published and coordinated by staff in the Science Sector. Stock assessments and other similar scientific documents are subject to peer review. The peer review process serves to present scientific information in an objective and credible manner. Hydrographic documents, such as charts and sailing directions, fall under the responsibility of the Dominion Hydrographer who has the authority under the Navigable Waters Act. As such, the Science Sector has requested that these technical science-based documents be excluded from the communications products referred to in the draft DFO Publishing Policy and Procedures dated June 2003. As a result, approvals by the appropriate authorities listed in the Policy are not required. Publishing issues like content, authority, and risk are areas of concern that should be discussed jointly between the Communications Branch, Legal Services and the Science Sector to ensure that all scientific publications for public dissemination meet the statutory requirements for government publishing.

Measurement of Workload

The review team found that although communications staff are fully utilized with the bulk of the work being reactive, there is no measurement of workload in the units. The work is primarily distributed by sector and communications officers in some regions, especially those handling the Fisheries Management and Coast Guard files, seem to be much busier than others. In order to establish appropriate priorities for staff and make the most effective use of resources, communications directors should analyze the current workloads to forecast future needs. The review team is of the opinion that establishing a process for collecting uniform data on workload and its measurement would overcome this barrier. It would take time and resources to put in place a system to regulate, record and compile the data, but it will be beneficial in the long term.

To be more efficient, the Department needs to address areas of duplication, the approvals process and workload measurement.

<u>Recommendations</u>

It is recommended that the Director General of Communications:

6) **prepare and maintain an inventory of all communications materials, products and published information in all formats at NHQ and the regions;**
7) **review the current approvals process and establish procedures and protocols which will enable communication products to be approved and released within a shorter timeframe without sacrificing quality; and**

8) **develop an approach to measure the workload of Communications staff to ensure that work is evenly distributed and resources are appropriately utilized.**

2.5. POLICIES AND BENCHMARKING

2.5.1 GOC Communications Policy

The *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, effective April 1, 2002, replaces the former *Government Communications Policy*, which had been in force since 1988. While the old policy served its purpose well, it became clear that the GOC had to update its communications approach to reflect the changing and diverse information needs of the Canadian public.

First, the old Communications Policy encouraged dialogue between the Canadian public and the federal government. The new policy is very explicit about the government's duty to inform and the citizen's right to be heard. Dialogue is not only encouraged but the policy favours consulting the public and taking into account people's interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies and planning programs and services. The new policy has an emphasis on clear communications with Canadians, in particular communication in both official languages. The new document also supports Ministers as the government's spokespersons. Although the previous policy was vague on the values of Canadians, the new policy identifies accountability, transparency, and accessibility as a few of the values that are important to the public.

Second, on the issues of horizontality, connectivity, partnering and regional communications, the new policy requires collaboration between, within, and among departments and agencies. Coordination between headquarters and regional operations is essential and regional communications staff should be included in planning and developing strategies. This is very different from the messages of encouraged co-operation and vague requirements on regional operations. The old policy also did not provide direction on partnerships and sponsorship with internal and external clients but the new guide has direct guidelines for engaging in such sponsorship deals. The previous document had very little comment on new technologies but now the Communications Policy states that both old and new technologies should be utilized in communications with Canadians in order to respond effectively in the 24-hour global communications environment.

The current policy favours a proactive approach to media relations that promotes public awareness and the full understanding of government policies and other initiatives. This direction would improve on the previous approach that placed departments in a reactive position when it came to dealing with the media. The old Communications Policy prohibited commercials in government publications except with Treasury Board approval and the new one extends the ban to web sites and restricts advertising during elections, among other things.

Last, the new policy differentiates between emergency and crisis communications and sets specific requirements for risk communications. In all cases, advance planning that includes evaluation of the risks to both the public and government departments and agencies must be accounted for, as well as planning for activities that go beyond the scope of normal procedure in special circumstances.
Based on these new guidelines and after undertaking a review of the Communications Function, DFO has not yet addressed the requirements of the new GOC Communications Policy in the following areas:

The Deputy Head leads the Communication Function;

- The Deputy Head ensures the Policy is followed;

- The Deputy Head leads internal communications and models proper communications behaviours;

- The Head of Communications manages the function;
    - Due to the organizational set-up of the Department, the activities of regional staff are coordinated and managed by the Regional Director of Communications, who reports and is accountable to the RDG. As a result, the Head of Communications has little management over the whole function but total control over the function at HQ. A change in the reporting relationship would alleviate this problem.

- The Function has the resources it needs to enact the Policy;
    - The function lacks knowledge of and the strategic capabilities needed to enact the Communications Policy and requires policy support from the centre of the function. Without this support, regional groups are interpreting policy requirements based on their own needs.
    - The Communications Function does not have the resources necessary to enact the Policy. Current resources are devoted to issues-management.

- Communications staff carry out all the duties of the Function;
    - DFO is an issues-driven department therefore the current communications practice is one focused on issues-management or reactivity. The result is that normal proactive activities that should be expected of a communications function are not being carried out as required by clients and the GOC Communications Policy.
    - Proactive activities are being undertaken by clients. Sectors are dedicating human and financial resources towards public education and outreach activities and the publication and distribution of brochures and other written materials, even advertising. Sector staff then, is assuming responsibilities outlined in the GOC Communications Policy that are specific to the communications function.

- Communications planning is integrated into business planning;
    - There is a need for a more formal mechanism to integrate communications and business planning. In the last six months, the Department has been prominently featured in the news media on a number of issues that the department could have been better prepared to deal with. It should be noted that the Media Relations unit is now coordinating the roll-up of all media activity across the country and sharing it at the end of each day with DMC members, Regional Directors of Communications and the Minister's Office. Communications staff, in conjunction with Sector staff, needs to be involved on the projects from the start and not just when the projects become an issue in the media.

- There is a Corporate Communications Plan;
    - A Communications Plan was developed in 2000 but only portions of the plan were ever implemented.
    - While *A Corporate Approach to Strategic Communications* was presented to DFO's DMC in March 2003, the Communications Function is currently evaluating its ability to fully implement this Approach. This review will help to determine the Function's capabilities.

- All Function staff members, including regional staff, are involved in planning and strategy development; and

- Regional offices have the resources they require.
    - The lack of time, financial, and human resources is forcing proactive activities (outreach, public education, strategic planning) to take a lower priority. All regional functions excel in issues-management activities but the desired focus of their clients lies in strategic thinking.

During this review, an examination of the some of the key policy requirements of *GOC Communications Policy* was carried out. Based on examination of the requirements, it is clear that steps will have to be taken to ensure that the Department and its Communications Function addresses non-compliance with those key requirements in order to fulfill the objectives of the *GOC Communications Policy*.

<u>Recommendation</u>

9)   It is recommended that an assessment be made of the extent to which the requirements of *the Government of Canada Communications Policy* are being fulfilled by the Communications Function. The gaps in compliance with the *Policy* should be identified and a plan put in place to address the areas of non-compliance.

2.5.2. Benchmarking

A Benchmarking Review of the Federal Government Communications Branches was completed in December 2001. The review was initiated by the Privy Council Office, Communications and Consultations Secretariat, in its capacity as functional leader of the Information Services (IS) Community in the Public Service of Canada. To conduct the review, the Communications and Consultations Secretariat engaged the services of Likely Communication Strategies Ltd. An update to the study will be carried out in fall 2003. DFO will participate in this benchmarking study.