

Policy Brief: Calling for Integrated Management of Saint John Harbour

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The southwest coast of New Brunswick, including the port city of Saint John, has experienced significant environmental challenges over the past two decades. There has been phenomenal growth in aquaculture, significant declines in groundfish stocks, expanding petrochemical development (LNG plant construction in Saint John, tanker traffic, submarine gas pipelines, and a planned new oil refinery), tidal power test sites, tourism growth and coastal gentrification. The larger Saint John Harbour area also serves as a catchment basin for the most heavily industrialized area of the province of New Brunswick, affected by agricultural and forestry run-off, pulp and paper mills, textile plants, the existing oil refinery, a brewery, freighter and cruise ship terminals, harbour dredging and dredge dumping, as well as raw municipal sewage outflows (in excess of 6 million litres per day). Mitigating these impacts requires better understanding of and management tools for social and economic behaviour and decision-making. There is an urgent need to build effective integrated management institutions to respond to those issues.

Jurisdictional issues are a significant aspect of the management challenge. The primary federal agencies with coastal and ocean responsibilities are the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Environment Canada and Transport Canada. Provincial and port authorities also have jurisdiction over some activities and spatial areas. International regulation must also be considered as Saint John is an international port. These jurisdictional overlaps have resulted in fragmentary and cumbersome harbour management. While the 1997 Oceans Act called for integrated management, progress has been disappointing for many stakeholders. Integrated management promised a much stronger role for them in the planning process but many stakeholders feel that their involvement is tokenism. In addition, public consultation has not always produced good local understanding of or local support for new initiatives, creating divisiveness rather than consensus (see CBC online news, 2007).

Fundy North Fishermen's Association is one stakeholder group that has been involved in public consultation for many of the new developments in the harbour. Among their members are a number of fishermen who fish within the harbour. Fundy North has been innovative in participating in many planning exercises. For example, they are interveners in the environmental impact assessment for the Eider Rock Oil Refinery project, particularly with respect to the potential impact of the project on the inshore fishing industry and local ecology. They have worked for several years with the DFO and Environment Canada to assess the impact on migrating lobsters of harbour dredging and of the dredge dump site off Black Point. This year work is being done to develop a management plan and monitoring protocol for the dumpsite in addition to the establishment of a formal committee to address the issue. In the Post-9/11 security environment, the Saint John Harbour Authority has severely restricted fishermen's access to the wharf facilities in the port city, and Fundy North has been working with harbour authorities to develop alternatives. As part of the HADD (Habitat Alteration, Disruption

or Destruction) program as compensation for damage that occurred with the construction of the Canaport LNG terminal, they undertook a ghost trap survey to find and assess the lobster mortality rates in traps lost as a result of tugboat and shipping damage to fishing gear.

Fundy North Fishermen's Association has representation on many of the ad hoc committees that have formed around specific Saint John harbour issues, including: the Dredging/Dumping Committee (chaired by Environment Canada), the SJ Wharf Committee (Small Craft Harbours/DFO), the LNG Community Liaison Committee (Canaport LNG) and the Harbour Traffic Committee (Transport Canada/Port Authority).

In all of these activities, the Fundy North membership has experienced first hand the frustrations created by the existing stakeholder consultation process. Part of the problem lies in the workings of the planning institutions – into which stakeholders and the public are invited, but for which there is unclear channels of responsibility and authority. Stakeholders often come to the table determined to protect their own economic interests, and with little knowledge or understanding of broader issues. As the consultation process requires unanimity, a single holdout stakeholder can scuttle innovations and responsible management. This has proven disastrous to environmental stewardship.

What appears to be needed is strong government leadership in establishing an integrated planning board to facilitate all harbour planning and operations. To further this end, Fundy North Fishermen's Association has initiated a research project to examine best practice in other Canadian harbours and to investigate integrated management of international harbours outside of Canada. It is hoped that new policy initiatives can be guided both by the experiences in Saint John harbour and by best practices from elsewhere.