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EDITORIAL

HIGHLIGHTING NOVA SCOTIA'S "OCEAN PLAYGROUND" IN THIS ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE – ANOTHER IMPORTANT ROLE FOR THE NSIS?

Nova Scotia is celebrated for being Canada's ocean province. Most citizens live near the coast, often in small communities, and they understand the need to protect our diverse ocean habitats. That said, new opportunities abound for improving the protection and conservation of our marine species, ecosystem health, and associated human health. As we respond to emerging problems, we should continue to be an example for other coastal jurisdictions, local to national to global, during this era of rapid climate change. Maintaining ocean health in the broadest sense is critical to our economy, tourism, food supply, and the environment. This core message should be repeated all levels of government and society, encouraged by activities of the NSIS and its members.

Nova Scotia is doing many things the right way to safeguard ocean ecosystems. Halifax and other locations in the province are recognized centres for ocean research, monitoring, technology, education, and training. Citizen groups are active with initiatives to promote ocean literacy. For example, during every June, the city of Halifax and many communities throughout the province celebrate Ocean Day and Ocean Week. This year, an exciting new initiative called Coastal Week was organized by the Ecology Action Centre and the Coastal Coalition of Nova Scotia. This involved groups such as CARP (Clean Annapolis River Project), CWF (Canadian Wildlife Federation), the Upper Bay of Fundy Research and Management Consortium, BoFEP (Bay of Fundy Ecosystem Partnership), CPAWS (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society), and others. In addition, there is a long-standing annual beach litter cleanup program in hot spots such as McNabs Island in Halifax Harbour and elsewhere throughout the province. Other actions include the ongoing protection and rescue of the endangered North Atlantic right whales by the CWF (Sean Brillant, pers. comm.)

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and the coastal monitoring of contaminants in blue mussels and sediments (A. Scovil, pers.comm).

Nova Scotia has important ocean literacy programs. For example, the Ocean School at Dalhousie University has been in place for several years. There is also a new cooperative program on ocean literacy that involves the NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the International Ocean Institute (IOI-Canada), and BoFEP. It provides assistance to high school teachers focusing on ocean topics and supporting science demonstrations. Recently, the Beaty Centre for Marine Biodiversity at the Ocean Frontier Institute of Dalhousie was opened; its aquaria and wonderful ocean displays are ocean literacy in action. The blue whale skeleton hanging above its displays is breathtaking to look at and brings home the wonder of the ocean and the importance of marine species protection!

However, many challenges and much work remain. Federal marine environmental quality (MEQ) or ocean health is a basic component of Canada's Ocean Act (1997) and programs related to this Act and others have thrived at Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Unfortunately, current activities are threatened by severe program cutbacks and the retirement or loss of irreplaceable dedicated ocean experts. This will affect regional work on MPAs (Marine Protected Areas), including related monitoring and support of local community programs. Despite the UN goal of 30% ocean protection by 2030, too few MPAs have been established, especially for the Bay of Fundy. Blue Beach, a renowned paleontological site on the Avon River estuary, is one site that needs formal protection (see the article in this PNSIS Issue).

Provincially, the NS Coastal Protection Act has been rejected by the current government, despite all party support. Hopefully, its passage is just delayed as there is much public support for coordinated coastal land management and protection. The current government is in favour of renewed gold mining on coastal lands despite the threat to water quality of rivers and estuaries. There has only been a limited study of possible recovery from such mining activity. After regional oil spills, e.g., Chedabucto Bay, Cape Breton Island, oil may persist along the shorelines. Ongoing concerns continue related to the impact of sea cage (open pen) salmon farming, of dams and causeways on our rivers and estuaries, and of future offshore energy wind farms. In these cases, monitoring and detailed environmental assessments are needed.

The list of ocean issues is obviously long! The NS provincial departments need to be more engaged. For example, it was disappointing to see poor attendance at a recent US-Canada GOMC (Gulf of Maine Council) meeting. This was despite the importance of the Gulf of Maine and Bay of Fundy in many areas to the provincial economy and the agreement since 1989 to collaborate on environmental quality issues that are cross border in nature. Given the many issues and opportunities that involve our coasts and offshore waters, the province must do better!

What can NSIS and its members across the province do to enhance the protection of our ocean spaces? The answer is much! For example, support Ocean Day and Ocean Week each year. We could also have a special series of ocean talks in the annual NSIS program. Other possible activities could be to invite provincial policy and management staff for a discussion or have a special "Ocean Health" issue of the PNSIS. This could cover both marine ecosystem and human health (see Wendy Watson-Wright's paper in PNSIS 52-2, 2022). The NSIS could also support more excursions to the coast for its members, as described in this Issue, and engage with other groups such as BoFEP and the Halifax Field Naturalists. Finally, NSIS should consider participating in the 12th Ocean Conference that is being planned for Halifax, May 2027.

Our Nova Scotia is an Ocean Province. We must do more to protect our portion of the blue planet. Let's open a discussion within NSIS on the way forward. In the meantime, enjoy the various papers in this Issue of PNSIS, some of which have a marine focus. For inspiration, take a walk along our beautiful coast or a swim at a local beach. We are after all an ocean playground!

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