

CASE STUDY BACKGROUNDER

GOSLIM and Environmental Governance

- *Oceans Act* and LOMA tools opened possibility for large scale integrated ocean planning
- The GOSLIM was one of five ‘first generation’ integrated management plans
- At the centre of this initiative was goal of regulating human activity impacts in the Gulf
- In building GOSLIM, the DFO, as lead agency, fashioned a suite of new tools and policies
- The ‘GOSLIM model’ combines science and multi-scale administrative mechanisms rather than ‘big plan’ architecture

In the 1990s a new thread of marine programming emerged in the form of ‘ocean policy’. Just as the 1977 declaration of a 200-nautical mile ‘fishing’ economic exclusion zone served to redefine Canada’s regulatory role in marine fishing, the 1996 release of a draft *Oceans Act* announced a new approach to marine planning more generally. So far as the Gulf of St. Lawrence was concerned, ocean planning raised a new set of policy issues. First, it defined large ocean spaces as connected ecosystems, as opposed to aggregations of specialized elements, and declared ecosystems to be the planning denominator of future government action. Second, it highlighted integrated management as a policy goal and rejected the tradition of single function programming or open-access regions. Third, it declared that new policy tools and paradigms would be required to achieve this transformation. Ocean planning was explicitly non-sectoral or anti-sectoral or trans-sectoral.

It is one thing to assert a set of values however, and another thing to put it into practice. What was the impact of large ocean management on the Gulf of St. Lawrence? At the centre of this story is the Gulf of St. Lawrence Integrated Management or GOSLIM process. How was integrated ocean planning framed and applied to the Gulf? What resistance came from prior programs and entrenched interests? What new policy mechanisms were fashioned? What impact ocean planning had on marine environmental management?

State efforts at ocean management are inherently political processes. Each target region is physically and biologically unique and the region’s signature features will help define the ocean planning challenge. Target regions are social, as well as natural, with populations, communities and organized groups that are both the subjects and objects of ocean planning. State structures must be built to advance ocean management goals. Planning implies deliberate action – toward what, how and defined by whom?

For the Gulf of St. Lawrence and for other large ocean areas, the process was both incremental and transformational. While ocean planning drew upon a novel vision of resource and environmental management, it was not designed on a blank page. The policy field was already crowded and change had to be negotiated with a complicated array of prior interests. It must also be recognized that any process that extends over some 15 years is vulnerable to policy shifts. At least three distinct paradigms can be detected within the GOSLIM era.



Reflections

The GOSLIM initiative on ocean planning in the Gulf can be assessed in several respects. First, the Gulf of St. Lawrence was a natural setting for integrated ocean management. The Gulf exhibited many of the features that the *Oceans Act* sought to address – a history of federal government programs packaged on a sectoral basis; increasing evidence of marine environmental pollution; and a virtually uncoordinated set of state agencies that seemed to miss the forest for the trees. What impact, then, did GOSLIM have on Gulf environmental management?

One of the most significant achievements of GOSLIM (and perhaps then other LOMAs as well) was the launch of a broad new ocean science initiative. GOSLIM was a data intensive endeavor. And while the state of scientific knowledge in the Gulf varied both by discipline and by institution, the expansion of the DFO science establishment and the accumulation of specialized studies is an impressive outcome.

When Ottawa declared its new commitment to ocean planning, it embraced several important principles and practices. There was a question of scale involved in programming. Initially, the LOMA was advanced as the prime working unit and five pilot projects were launched. However, the LOMA prototype had definite limits. As work progressed, ecological analysis pointed to a lower level of regional resolution, defined by EBSAs, MPAs, ERIs and others. Also, the initial companion units to the LOMAs – known as coastal management areas or CMAs, proved far more difficult than expected to launch. Furthermore, coastal planning necessitated cooperation with provinces and priorities seldom coalesced here. Yet ocean management did not prove to be a fulfilling field for federal-provincial collaboration. Consequently, GOSLIM was forced periodically to consider ‘rescaling’ its operations and the optimal scale was never fully resolved.

It is possible that, by 2015, ocean policy had entered a post-LOMA stage. The absence of a fully elaborated GOSLIM document is a case in point. Despite its title, the 2013 Plan statement is more an interim report than a finished product. Indeed, the DFO *2012 State of the Gulf* report, despite being authored and attributed to Fisheries and Oceans officials, offers far more pointed policy proposals. Furthermore the 2014 *Regional Ocean Planning* document for the DFO Maritimes Region is explicit in declaring that GOSLIM’s neighbour, the Eastern Scotian Shelf Integrated Management initiative or ESSIM, was finished, alluding to the need for new ways forward. In some DFO circles today, the term whole ocean spatial management is being offered as a next step.