

**THE COUNCIL OF FISHERIES AND OCEAN LIBRARIANS / CONSEIL DES  
BIBLIOTHÈQUES DE PÊCHES ET OCÉANS – TWENTY FIVE YEARS AND  
STILL GOING STRONG**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the spring of 1980, a group of librarians of a small Canadian government department, met to discuss problems facing the libraries of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Each of the DFO libraries was independent. There was no national library budget, each library was dependent for resources upon the agency to which it reported. There were no national library programs, standards or activities, each library provided a set of services that was characterized by its history, organizational affiliation and resources. The meeting decided to establish a national library network and to manage it by a committee of the department's librarians, the Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians / Conseil des bibliothèques de Pêches et Océans (COFOL). Over the past quarter century, COFOL has established an active and effective national library network based on a series of national programs that includes the WAVES / VAGUES union catalogue, a set of common cataloguing standards, a national integrated library system providing circulation and serials management, a digital archive of DFO report literature and national desktop access to electronic subscriptions. The COFOL model of cooperative management based on consensus and wide participation of its members may be one that can be utilized in other situations.

## THE BEGINNINGS

In June 1980, a group of 10 librarians from a small Canadian government department met in Vancouver to discuss problems facing the libraries of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). During the meeting, a consensus developed that there was a need for a permanent organization within the department to ensure management support for its libraries. Anna Oxley agreed to draft a set of terms of reference for consideration at the group's next meeting. In late October 1980, following the Halifax IAMSLIC meeting, the group met again and adopted terms of reference for the *Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians / Conseil des bibliothèques de Pêches et Océans* (COFOL). The terms of references were approved the following spring by DFO senior management.

### **The situation in 1980 -- the Library world**

The computer was a critical element of library operation in North America at the start of the 1980's but in a radically different way than we are accustomed today. Main frames were the platforms on which computer applications were found. Most automated library systems were custom built systems tailored to the unique combinations of hardware and operating systems found on main frames. Integrated library systems, running a suite of library applications on a common database, were uncommon. While the Apple II had appeared in 1978, the PC revolution, with its use of common operating systems and application software, awaited the appearance of the IBM personal computer in 1981.

Library catalogues commonly were computer based, but rarely was there public online access. The most common outputs were microfiche, printouts and card sets. In addition, catalogues normally were limited to one library. Hints of future developments were in the wind, however. OCLC was beginning to expand beyond its Ohio roots. Melvyl, the University of California system, was testing online access for the University of California network.

Online access to major bibliographic resources was available but usually only through libraries with service accounts. During the 1970's, many major bibliographic resources, including Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, ERIC, NTIS, and INSPEC, had appeared as digital databases. Major bibliographic utilities, such as DIALOG, SDC/Orbit and CAN/OLE and QL Systems in Canada, offered these and other databases to libraries. However, the interfaces to these systems and the structure of the databases were complex and trained information specialists were required to conduct searches on behalf of the library's clients. In addition, access was slow and generally limited to dialup access through a local telephone utility. The portable data terminal with acoustic modem was a familiar feature of many libraries at the time.

Resource sharing in 1980 meant interlibrary loan. The requests were made by mail (post), telex and less frequently by fax. Loans and photocopies were sent by postal mail. New materials received by libraries were almost exclusively in a printed format, although microfiche was becoming more common as an original publication format.



Figure 1: The Institute of Ocean Sciences Library Book Catalogue was housed in the Central computing department

#### **The situation in 1980 – DFO libraries**

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans was a new Canadian government department in 1980. It had been created the previous year from the Fisheries and Marine Service and other elements of Environment Canada, which itself had been created 10 years earlier from a variety of Canadian government agency including the Fisheries Research Board of Canada (FRBC) and the Department of Fisheries. DFO was in midst of creating a new corporate culture from its resource management elements (the former Department of Fisheries) and the research elements (the old Fisheries Research Board of Canada). It had 13 organized library collections in 1980, 5 in British Columbia, 2 each in Quebec and Nova Scotia, 1 each in Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Each of the libraries had a unique history and group of clients, only 2 of them served an exclusively management/policy client group, 8 others served a predominantly science community, and the remaining 3 served a mixed science / management group, although even these 3 were based on former FRBC collections.

DFO did not have a national library program, or a departmental librarian in 1980. Each library received its budget and reported to a non-librarian manager within the regions. Efforts by the Environment Canada Head Librarian in the mid 1970's to create a more organized, coordinated, centralized library network had foundered against the objections of senior fisheries managers (most from the former FRBC sites). Consequently, each DFO library was independent. There was no common budget or program to share resources, there were no common library programs, there was no common reporting structure, there were no common standards for library service or staffing of the libraries and there was no structure through which the DFO libraries could cooperate or share

experiences. In particular, there was a wide variation in the level of resources provided to the DFO libraries. Several of the libraries had only 1 or 2 staff members, while others had a dozen or more to serve similar user groups. In addition, there was no standardization in the level of staffing in the libraries – some libraries were managed by trained librarians, others by trained library technicians and others by untrained clerks with extensive experience in libraries.

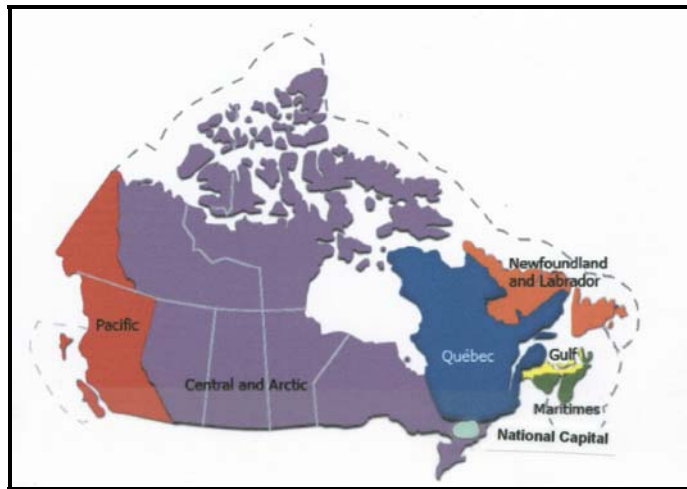


Figure 2: DFO regions: Newfoundland and Labrador, Maritimes, Gulf, Québec, National Capital, Central and Arctic, Pacific

#### **Creation of the Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians**

At the 1980 meetings, the managers of the DFO libraries came to the realization that the senior DFO librarians had to meet regularly to discuss common problems and to share experiences. In addition, they realized that if the libraries were to be able to respond to departmental initiatives with a common voice or to petition the department in support of future activities that some sort of formal organization was required. Finally, they realized that such a formal structure could not be based on a centralized departmental structure.

The formal terms of reference for the Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians included the following points

#### **Purpose**

- to provide a forum for discussion of matters which are of mutual concern...
- to provide a vehicle for collective action ...
- to provide endorsement for cooperation ...

- to investigate and discuss new techniques and systems with an aim to improving libraries in the entire department
- to make recommendations ... to ... managers on matters affecting libraries in the entire department

**Composition**

- Council composed of one representative from each DFO library [normally the manager]
- Chairperson to be elected by a majority of the Council. Term of office to be one year

**Meetings**

- at least one meeting a year...

In addition to the formal terms of reference, several other practices were adopted early on:

- meetings would rotate through the various DFO library worksites
- decisions would be made by consensus
- activities would be conducted on a cooperative basis – each library and member of Council would contribute as time and resources permitted

Most of COFOL's activities are conducted between meetings by a series of standing or ad-hoc committees. The 2006/2007 committees are concerned with

- WAVES database (5 members)
- DFO virtual library (5 members)
- Digitization standards (4 members)
- Electronic subscriptions (5 members)
- DFO library statistics (5 members)

**CHANGES TO COFOL SINCE 1980**

The composition of COFOL has changed a good deal since 1980. The Library of the Arctic Biological Station library and two Pacific coast libraries were closed and the collections were dispersed. The Halifax and Dartmouth libraries have been consolidated at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography. The Quebec library moved to the Institut Maurice-Lamontagne, at Mont-Joli, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. A new library opened at Moncton, New Brunswick, to serve the new DFO Gulf Region. In the early 1990's the Canadian Coast Guard became part of DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard College Library at Sydney, Nova Scotia and the Fleet Technical Library at Ottawa joined the DFO library community. The Fleet Technical Library subsequently merged with the larger, older Ottawa library that serves DFO's National Capital Region.

In the mid 1980's, again in the mid 1990's and most recently in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, DFO went through a series of restructuring (i.e. downsizing) exercises. In addition to the closure of libraries mentioned earlier, the libraries lost staff and some

financial resources. There also have been some organization changes. In the Maritimes, management of all the region's libraries was consolidated.



**Figure 3: 1987 COFOL meeting, National Capital Region, Ottawa, ON**



**Figure 4: 2006 COFOL meeting, Bedford Institute Oceanography, Dartmouth, NS**

## COFOL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

COFOL's major accomplishment over the past 25 years has been transformation of a series of independent libraries into an active nation-wide library network that provides a series of national library programs to DFO. An account of our initial successes can be found in Betty Sutherland's presentation at the 12<sup>th</sup> IAMSLIC conference in 1986.

The *WAVES/VAGUES* program has been at the core of most of COFOL's activities since its inception in the 1982. (see Olson, Fiander, Cameron, Conroy & Lalande 2000 for a detailed narrative outlining its evolution). *WAVES/VAGUES* provides the information on which COFOL can share collection resources. It serves as a bibliography of DFO publications, and provides the links to electronic DFO documents. It also provides the links to those electronic subscriptions to which DFO staff have desktop access.

*WAVES/VAGUES* is an integrated library system with web based public access as well as cataloguing, serials control and circulation modules. It is based on the principle that there will be only one bibliographic record for each document. Any library may create this core bibliographic record and it is shared by all libraries that hold that document. In addition, any library that holds the document may modify or enhance the core record. Any number of copy records can be added to the core bibliographic record to reflect the unique shelving requirements of the individual libraries. Finally, *WAVES/VAGUES* has some unique thesaurus features. Species names, corporate names and corporate series are authority-controlled.

*WAVES/VAGUES* also provides a great example of how COFOL works. The financial resources that are required to maintain the database and the BASIS TechLib software are provided by the National Capital Region (Ottawa) library. The WAVES database manager also is provided by the Ottawa library. Cataloguing standards, cataloguing policies and procedures are developed by the WAVES committee which consists of librarians from several DFO libraries. Bibliographic and copy records for the *WAVES/VAGUES* are created, and modified by cataloguers from all the DFO libraries. For some monographic series, individual libraries have made formal *cooperative cataloguing agreements* in which they agree to catalogue all current items of a particular series on behalf of the network. In addition, the thesaurus files for the authority controlled fields are maintained by volunteer coordinators.

More recent accomplishments include the initiation of a digital archive for DFO documents, and the implementation of department wide desktop to electronic journals. The digital archive project is an extension of an early COFOL initiative to collect and preserve DFO's publications. Electronic editions of DFO documents are stored on the COFOL server and are linked to the catalogue record in the *WAVES/VAGUES* database. These documents are collected from the publishers by the regional libraries and are submitted to the WAVES database manager for archiving. COFOL has been acquiring subscriptions to electronic journals for several years on a somewhat ad-hoc basis, as we waited for the implementation of a national program by a consortium of Canadian

government agencies. In 2005 COFOL decided that the DFO libraries could wait no longer, and the Electronic subscriptions committee negotiated nation-wide desktop access to titles within the ScienceDirect and SpringerLink systems. The subscriptions were paid for by contributions from each DFO libraries regular budget. This is another example of sharing and cooperation that characterizes COFOL.

Another example of the cooperation and shared responsibility is COFOL's approach to collection development. Each library is a *Primary resource centre* for legacy print materials and agrees to maintain these materials on behalf of the network.



Figure 5: a WAVES record

## CHALLENGES FOR COFOL

**Financial resources.** The budgets of for DFO libraries have not kept up to the demands for a quality up-to-date service. Our ability to support existing electronic subscriptions in 2007 and beyond is in question. Our ability to maintain our obligations to Aquatic Science and Fisheries Information System (ASFA) also is questionable, as is our ability to pay for software upgrades and system maintenance for *WAVES/VAGUES*.

Beginning in 2003, COFOL has been preparing briefs for senior DFO management, outlining our requirements for additional funds. At present, a COFOL committee is working on a business case that includes a detailed rationale for additional financial support.



**WAVES/VAGUES.** Presently, our catalogue database is not compatible with the Z39.50 protocols. Consequently, *WAVES/VAGUES* records do not appear in mega catalogues such as the IANSLIC Distributed Library. In addition, software for non Z39.50 integrated library systems is limited. COFOL may have to consider converting its database to a Z39.50 compliant format.

**Libraries and Information Management.** Throughout the past 25 years, DFO library staff has been involved in a wide variety of non-traditional activities including: report publishing, editing, publication distribution, data archiving, records management, and website development. Many of these activities are now characterized as Information Management and agencies have developed new structures, policies and procedures to deal with these issues. Within DFO, the libraries are working to have their skilled and experienced staff to become directly involved in general planning and coordination of Information Management activities.

**Organizational change.** Recently, senior DFO managers have come to the realization that COFOL and the DFO library network do not fit into traditional hierarchical organization models. The library network is a national program yet the management of the program is in the hands of DFO staff without formal national responsibilities. This awareness may in part be a result of COFOL's recent efforts to obtain additional resources and to have direct involvement in DFO Information Management. Regional DFO managers, particularly those in the Science sector, remain reluctant to relinquish control of local libraries. A COFOL committee is working with senior members of DFO Information Management group to develop a management structure that will recognize both the regional and national roles of COFOL and DFO libraries.

#### **AFTERWORD**

COFOL provides an example of how a group of librarians without formal organization support, have been able to establish an active and effective library network. The COFOL model, based on cooperation, sharing, consensus and distributed participation, may prove to be one that other groups of libraries could adopt.

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