



Workshop Backgrounders

2003 OMRN National Conference



Integrated Management – Case Studies

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*Harmony, Balance and our Future are in our Nature
Partnering to Secure Our Sustainability: Bras d'Or Lakes Watershed*

A Vision

The communities within the Bras d'Or Lakes Watershed have identified issues threatening their integrity. The social and economic health of these communities is dependent on the health of the Bras d'Or. Our intent is to build on and support the collaborative initiatives currently active in the Bras d'Or while respecting the existing legislative responsibilities of various government departments and First Nations Treaty Rights. Existing management approaches are failing and in this regard, we need to look at fresh new approaches and relationships, so that working together we can strengthen the work to restore balance, harmony and quality of life for us now, and for future generations. We are but a small part in the web of life.

Significance

The Bras d'Or Lakes and surrounding watershed are recognized by many as one of the greatest assets on Cape Breton Island. They provide recreational opportunities in the summer months, including cottaging, boating, hiking, and fishing, and host numerous cultural activities throughout the year. These activities attract thousands of tourists annually who contribute significantly to the island's economy. A local commercial fishery, as well as other primary and secondary industries, provide a source of livelihood for Bras d'Or residents. In addition, there are many areas surrounding the lakes that have historical, cultural and spiritual significance to its first inhabitants, the Mi'kmaw people.

The Bras d'Or Lakes are also a rich marine ecosystem with water chemistry, energy inputs and animal life unique from the adjacent ocean or freshwater ecosystems. This uniqueness, including its circulation patterns and slow flushing rate, makes it vulnerable to human activities. These activities have led to declining quality of the Lakes, and as a result, of the quality and way of life for the communities living there. The health, prosperity and stability of these communities is inseparable from the health of the Lakes; a fact shared by First Nations and non-First Nations alike.

Issues

There are a number of issues in the Bras d'Or Lakes affecting the quality and way of life of its residents and visitors. Examples of these issues include:

- Fish stocks that are in decline;
- Sewage (from faulty or absent treatment systems, farm runoff and recreational boating);
- An economy that is being impacted by the closure of contaminated shellfish growing areas;

- Human health that is at risk from sewage based bacteria, viruses and pathogens;
- Tourism and recreational opportunities vulnerable to changes in the actual and perceived quality of the environment;
- Wildlife habitats (terrestrial, freshwater and marine) being destroyed from forestry and other land development practices;
- Workforce education and skill upgrades that require support;
- A fishery impacted by invasive species, such as the oyster parasite MSX and Green Crab;
- Growth and diversity of the local economy are being affected by many of these issues, resulting in high unemployment, lack of meaningful employment, and out-migration of youth.

Due to the severity and complexity of these issues, an overall coordinated approach to deal with their environmental, social and economic dimensions is required. Coordination must include efforts among various government, First Nations, non-government, and industry groups.

What is being done now

In addition to the many municipal, provincial and federal government departments with active programs addressing social, economic and environmental needs within the Bras d'Or, there are also a number of groups and organizations formed and working to address significant sustainability issues. These groups include First Nations, NGO's, industry associations, and community groups, as well as municipal, provincial and federal departments that recognize the need to work collaboratively to achieve their goals. Successes through these broader partnerships are starting to be realized in areas such as sewage treatment, education and awareness, inclusion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), mapping, and others. Examples of key groups undertaking some of this work include:

- [Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources](#) (UINR), representing the five First Nations Communities in Cape Breton;
- [Nova Scotia Sustainable Communities Initiative](#) (SCI) Bras d'Or Lakes Field Team, composed of representatives of First Nations, federal, provincial and municipal government departments and agencies;
- The [Pitu'paq Committee](#), composed of Municipal and First Nations leaders;
- The Bras d'Or Partnership Committee, lead by representatives of First Nations and composed of federal and provincial governments, a variety of community and interest groups, and industry;
- The [Science for the Integrated Management of the Bras d'Or Lakes](#) (SIMBOL) group, a partnership of scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources;
- The [Bras d'Or Stewardship Society](#), a citizen based, lake-wide organization; along with
- Many local organizations active and engaged in a wide variety of issues within specific areas.

The formation of these groups represents an important milestone in the overall approach to managing the Bras d'Or.

Each group has been formed with a specific mandate, draws on a range of participants, and communicates and is supported in a variety of ways. Together, these groups form a loose network with similar objectives and many overlaps. One of the challenges for both participants within these groups and those outside of them is to gain an appreciation of who is working in the Bras d'Or, what they are trying to achieve, and if they are supportive of one another or can be better supported. The overall sustainability of the Bras d'Or will depend on the coordination of these groups, as well as ensuring that gaps between the mandates of these groups and existing government programs are identified and addressed. To this end efforts are underway to enhance existing networking and stewardship efforts by developing a collaborative planning process for the Bras d'Or.

Why is a collaborative planning process necessary?

Collaborative planning is fundamentally about increasing the efficiency of existing players in the Bras d'Or. This is achieved by linking these players together in various ways. Rather than adding a layer of bureaucracy, collaborative planning aims to increase the sharing and coordination between all involved and foster complimentary actions. This is done while respecting existing legislative and regulatory responsibility of various government departments and First Nations Treaty rights. Specific elements to be shared and coordinated among the many groups and agencies involved include:

Sharing of:	Coordination of:
Vision(s)	Communications
Issue Identification	Enforcement
Limited human and financial resources	Policies
Information and Expertise	Objectives
Decision-making processes	Responsibilities
Planning	Public Engagement
Research	Monitoring

The establishment of an overall collaborative planning process for the Bras d'Or could:

- Strengthen existing initiatives;
- Address gaps that exist between them;
- Reduce duplication of effort;
- Establish a framework for problem solving;
- Stretch existing financial resources; and,
- Build partnerships to overcome the fragmentation of responsibility inherent in our system of government.

To undertake more collaborative planning in the Bras d'Or, eventually an organizational structure (model) through which it can take place will need to be agreed to. This model will serve to clarify linkages between existing groups, agencies and communities, and help direct the roles and responsibilities of each in undertaking planning for the Lakes and watershed lands. While many examples of models exist, the challenge will be to develop one that is appropriate to the context of the Bras d'Or Lakes and its communities.

Advancing discussion on the issue of collaborative planning in the Bras d'Or requires the input of all players. A two-stage process has been initiated to help government and First Nations come to some agreement before the broader public is engaged:

Step 1:

- A workshop for municipal, provincial and federal government agencies and First Nations was held in October 2003. The objectives of this workshop were to:
- Develop a shared vision of how to better manage the Bras d'Or;
- Seek agreement on the scope of issues and their urgency in the Bras d'Or that can and should be addressed;
- Explore the concept of Collaborative Planning;
- Foster dialogue on strengthening partnerships within the Bras d'Or;
- Explore the next steps to advance collaborative solutions.

Step 2:

Having developed a common understanding and approach among the three levels of government and First Nations regarding collaborative planning, this discussion will be extended to the broader public including NGO's, industry, communities, and others. This broader engagement will help refine approaches and build a partnership base to move forward.

Case study author(s)

Adapted by **K. Vodden** from a Concept Paper presented by D. Duggan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and C. Dennis, Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources to an October 2003 Workshop Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources.