COFOL (Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians): The Canadian Experience

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ABSTRACT

The Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians (COFOL) is a network consisting of the 13 major libraries serving Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans. This paper includes a brief history of the network and discusses some of its major projects, including development of a union catalogue database of material held in COFOL libraries (WAVES), and the use of a primary resource centre concept to handle the challenge posed by the need for an active gifts and exchange programme within a decentralized government department, most of whose libraries are experiencing the combined problems of insufficient space and staff and a program of government restraint.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1980, the Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians (COFOL) has made significant contributions to the development of library and information services within the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). In this paper I intend to give a brief history of the Council and its organizational setting, and to describe a few of its activities and accomplishments.

SETTING

The Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans is a Canadian federal government department with responsibility, as its name implies, for federal programs relating to Canada's fisheries and coastal waters. The Department can trace its roots back to Canadian Confederation with the establishment in 1867 of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. However, like so many other government departments in Canada and elsewhere, its name changed many times over the years, and parts of its current mandate, particularly in the areas of hydrography and oceanography, were at times the responsibilities of other government departments. It has operated under its present name since April 1979.

The Department's current mandate includes "the comprehensive husbandry and management of Canada's fisheries resource base, through the protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of individual fish stocks and the aquatic habitat upon which these resources depend; the
'best use' of fisheries resources, through a variety of measures affecting when, where, how and by whom these resources are harvested, processed and marketed to obtain optimal social-economic benefits; an adequate hydrographic survey and chart production program to enable hydrographic charts and other publications to be produced for safe navigation in Canadian waters; the acquisition of the necessary knowledge base pertaining to oceanic processes and environments to support activities related to defence, marine transportation, the exploitation of offshore energy resources, and the management of the fishery resource and its aquatic habitat; the provision of a national ocean information service; the provision and administration of a national system of harbours in support of commercial fishing vessels and recreational boating.\(^{(1)}\)

Like all Canadian federal government departments, the Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has its headquarters in the nation's capital, Ottawa. However, its operations are highly decentralized, with its approximately 6,000 staff members working out of over 700 operational facilities, including regional, district and local offices and field research facilities, enforcement and research vessels, and 12 major research institutes.\(^{(2)}\) To serve the bibliographic needs of this widely dispersed department are 13 major libraries, located in Ottawa and at the 12 research institutes and therefore spread across the country, literally from sea to sea. (Fig.1.) [Slide: Map of

Figure 1. Map of Canada showing locations of major Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries.
Canada showing locations of F&O libraries] They range in size from the small library at the Arctic Biological Station at Sainte-Anne de Bellevue, with its single staff member and 4,000 books, reports and journal titles, to the Bedford Institute of Oceanography (BIO) Library with its staff of 3 professional librarians and 6 library assistants and a collection of nearly 50,000 titles. Most were set up to serve only Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans personnel, but four of them have a mandate to serve personnel from other federal departments as well. For example, the BIO Library serves (and receives funding) from parts of 3 different departments, and the library at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters in Burlington, Ont., is structurally part of the Dept. of the Environment, although it functions as the library for DFO staff located at the Centre. They also function as resource collections in their local area, serving private industry and university personnel and other external users. The libraries all report to regional management, rather than directly to Ottawa, although the responsibilities of the Department’s Director of Library Services do include provision of “functional guidance” to regional managers on matters concerning libraries.

HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

The Council of Fisheries and Oceans Librarians (COFOL) began in 1980. For a number of years, the heads of the various libraries which were part of the old Dept. of Fisheries and Environment had been meeting annually to discuss topics of mutual concern. When this department split in 1979 into two separate departments, those libraries which now served the new Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans decided to continue this practice. The federal government had recently embarked on a period of fiscal restraint, and it therefore seemed more important than ever before that the Department’s libraries work together as much as possible, despite the geographical distances that separated them.

A first meeting was held in Vancouver in June 1980, at which it was decided to create a formal structure for the group. Terms of reference were drafted and were eventually approved by senior DFO management in March 1981, thereby making COFOL an official departmental committee. According to these Terms of Reference, COFOL provides a forum for discussion of matters of mutual concern to DFO libraries, a vehicle for collective action regarding difficulties identified as needing a unified voice, and endorsement for cooperation among DFO libraries (e.g., collection rationale, inter-library lending, exchange agreements); investigates and discusses new techniques and systems, including computer-assisted reference and cataloguing services, with an aim to improving libraries in the entire department; and makes recommendations through the member on Council, to regional managers on matters affecting libraries in the entire department. The Council is composed of one representative from each DFO Library who is to be the person in charge of the library or his/her designate. The chairperson is elected for a one-year term by majority vote of the Council. COFOL typically meets only once per year, usually in June, and always in a different location. However, members maintain frequent contact with each other between meetings by telephone and by means of its electronic mail network (a group within the federal government’s GEMS system, which in turn is part of the major Canadian ENVOY network).

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the six years since its inception, COFOL and its individual members have undertaken many projects, some major, some minor, some successful, some less so. There is, however, not enough
space to discuss them all. I will, however, describe a few of the more significant activities that have met with at least partial success. (There is no such thing in the library world as a total success, I'm convinced.)

**Primary Resource Centers**

All librarians involved with publication exchange programs have a love/hate relationship with the whole exchange concept. They know how important much of the information contained in the publications is for their collections; they know that their libraries probably couldn't find the money to pay for the material they receive on exchange; and they know that some of the material they obtain this way is simply not available by any other means. But they also know that much of the material is used infrequently; it is time-consuming and expensive to control (whether catalogued, indexed, or kardexed); it consumes precious shelf-space in already crowded stacks; and negotiating and managing the exchange agreements themselves is time-consuming if they are to be kept at all up-to-date. COFOL librarians face an additional challenge. A DFO library's publication exchange agreement with a given institution may be either part of a Departmental exchange agreement, involving the Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, or it may have been negotiated on an individual station basis using that station's publications in the various Departmental technical and data report series.

Not surprisingly, the question of retention of exchange materials, especially serials, came up for discussion at the COFOL's first meeting in 1980. Everyone agreed that none of the Department's libraries could afford to keep titles of little or no interest to their own immediate users. However, as custodians of possibly the major fisheries and aquatic sciences collections in Canada, they also realized the importance of ensuring that this potentially useful material be held in at least one location. Out of this basic agreement of principle came the development of the Council's Policy on Primary Resource Centres (PRCs), whereby the libraries agreed to share the responsibilities of retaining and providing access to "all significant publications of a scientific, technical or socio-economic nature relating to fisheries and aquatic sciences by acting as a Primary Resource Centre for a specific type or group of publications."(3)

PRCs are designated initially by topic (i.e., fisheries sciences, oceanography, and limnology) and then by the country of origin of publication. Thus, for example, the BIO Library is now officially responsible for the publications from oceanographical institutes and organizations in Europe, Africa, and the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal states of North and South America, while the Institute of Ocean Sciences (IOS) in Sidney, B.C., is responsible for the equivalent material from the rest of the world. The Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg has assumed responsibility for the material from freshwater institutes around the world and for fisheries institutes and organizations in non-coastal American states. Responsibility for the publications from fisheries institutes and organizations elsewhere in the world is divided up on a geographical basis among the other COFOL libraries. The Department's Headquarters Library is also responsible for publications of international organizations, such as the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). This division of the world into areas is now known affectionately to COFOL members as "the world according to COFOL".

As PRC for a given country's publications, a library is responsible for "maintaining publications for which it has jurisdiction,[...] providing access to these publications...[and] reporting the titles of these publications to the appropriate union list of serials, union catalogue or bibliographic database."(4) Thus, for example, it promises to retain relevant materials received on exchange
from that country indefinitely. Before canceling an exchange agreement, other COFOL libraries are expected to check with the PRC for that discipline/country to ensure that it holds the publication in question. If not, the unwanted material is forwarded to the PRC or the exchange as a whole transferred, provided, of course that the PRC is prepared to accept it. (It is an unfortunate fact of life that some of the libraries are simply unable at present to fulfill their role as a PRC because of lack of sufficient shelf space to house any additional material and/or staff to handle any additional workload.) Thus the policy states that "full implementation of this policy awaits adequate resources."

It is important to note that the PRC concept does not prevent a COFOL library from establishing other exchange agreement if it so wishes. What it does mean is that, with the exception of those titles for which it has responsibility as PRC, a DFO library is free to cancel exchange agreements already in existence or to decide that it wants to retain material received on exchange for a limited time only.

Access to Information and Privacy Acts

On 1 July 1983 Canada's Access to Information and Privacy acts were proclaimed. The Access to Information Act requires that every government department or institution shall "provide facilities at the headquarters of the institution and at such offices of the institution as are reasonably practicable where the public may inspect any manuals used by employees of the institution in administering or carrying out programs or activities of the institution that affect the public."(5) At least partially because of the libraries' past record of being willing and able to handle information requests from the general public and their demonstrated ability to communicate quickly and effectively through the COFOL network, DFO senior management agreed to designate its libraries as the official Departmental "reading rooms" and its librarians as the first points of contact for those submitting requests under the Act. Briefly, the heads of regional libraries are responsible for the initial processing of requests, ensuring that the requested information is prepared in an appropriate format and within the time-frame prescribed by the Act, maintaining official records of the request, including entries in the Department's Access to Information database, and keeping the Department's Access to Information and Privacy coordinators informed of the progress of all requests. As a result, DFO librarians, especially the Director of Library Services in Ottawa where most of the queries arrive, play a significant role in the Department's handling of requests under these two acts.

DFO Policy on Deposit of Publications in Departmental Libraries

COFOL members also played a large role in the development and subsequent implementation of the Department's official policy on Deposit of Publications in Departmental Libraries.(6) According to this policy directive, which was issued in July 1985, at least one copy of all published material (books, scientific, technical and socio-economic reports, articles, conference proceedings, etc.) and unpublished reports (briefs prepared for investigations, internal reports, substantive policy statements, program plans, etc.) written by DFO staff or produced on contract for DFO must be deposited in both the DFO library in the region where the item originated and in the Department's headquarters library. When this policy is fully implemented across the country, the libraries' ability to provide bibliographic control over Departmental publications and to assist in transmitting Departmentally-produced information to the Canadian public will be greatly enhanced.
Performance Indicators

Another of COFOL's early accomplishments was its success in defining a set of library performance indicators satisfactory to both senior Departmental management and library managers. Senior management wanted statistics which were at least somewhat indicative of library performance, and library managers needed them to be ones which were easily kept. (In a one-person operation, spending time keeping statistics does not tend to rank high on the priority list.) After much discussion, all members agreed to maintain the following basic set of statistics: number of items added to the library's collection, number of interlibrary loans (both incoming and outgoing), number of reference queries received, and use of library's collection (i.e., items borrowed (excluding interlibrary loans) and items used in-house). To ensure that all libraries counted the same things in the same way, the Council also came up with working definitions of the terms involved. Individual libraries may maintain other statistics as well, of course, but all keep at least this basic set.

ASFA

COFOL also functions of course as an unofficial lobbying group with organizations other than DFO management. Representing as it does 13 libraries, it can and does voice the needs and wishes of a large percentage of the fisheries and aquatic science related libraries within Canada. Two successful "campaigns" stand out. The first was the decision by DFO's Scientific Information and Publications Branch (SIPB) to input the DFO translation series into the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) database, beginning in January 1983. In this effort COFOL was one of a number of pressure groups, including IAMSLIC and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) libraries, which successfully persuaded the ASFIS partners to add translations to the database. The second was the campaign by COFOL and other Canadian scientific libraries, to have ASFA added to the list of databases available on the CAN/OLE (CANadian On-Line Enquiry) system. Since CAN/OLE already included such other major databases as BIOSIS, Chemical Abstracts, GEOREF, and NTIS, the addition of ASFA in 1984 made "one-stop shopping" for bibliographical information on marine science topics on a Canadian system a reality as of 1984.

WAVES/VAGUES

The projects described thus far are all important, but none can compare in size or long-term significance to the development of the WAVES/VAGUES database. (The name is not an acronym, but English and French words chosen because they seemed appropriate to both fisheries and oceans related material.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY: Although they also contain titles from such "peripheral" subject areas as general biology, chemistry, geology, and environmental sciences, the collections held in COFOL libraries focus of course on material covering the marine sciences, fisheries, and limnology. As IAMSLIC members know only too well, much of this material comes in the form of technical and data reports or as contract reports to government agencies. The WAVES database had its origin in the need to find a means of dealing with this non-commercial but vital material.

For a number of years the Department's Scotia/Fundy Regional Library in Halifax had maintained a KWOC (Keyword-out-of-Context) index to its collection of government documents and other grey literature reports. By 1980 this index contained over 50,000 references and, with its ab-
breviated references and lack of authority control of any kind, had lost its effectiveness as a retrieval tool. Therefore, when the computer service bureau handling production of the index announced in 1980 termination of service to the Library effective February 1982, the pressure and opportunity existed to find an alternate means of controlling the collection. After thorough analysis of possible alternatives, the Library decided to create a database on the Basis Private File Service, designed by Battelle Columbus Laboratories and serviced in Canada by Infomart. The design phase began in May 1981 and by January 1982 the system was fully operational within the Scotia/Fundy Library.

Although designed to meet the particular needs of that specific DFO library, all interested COFOL members were invited to a meeting in September 1981 at which the record format was discussed with Infomart personnel. From the beginning the goal was to make the database available to all DFO libraries both for searching and as a means of controlling their own document collections. Thus the record was designed in such a way that bibliographical information was located in specific fields, while local information peculiar to an individual library (e.g., call number, holdings statement) would be confined to an area called "local fields". In this way libraries inputting to the system could share the basic bibliographic record, thus avoiding duplication of indexing effort, but still maintain local holdings information. This characteristic of the file would also turn WAVES eventually into a union list which could be used not only for identification and description of items, but also as a location device for interlibrary loan purposes.(7)

RECORD STRUCTURE AND CREATION: Records in the WAVES database consist of the following bibliographic fields: personal author, corporate author, date, title, publisher, series statement, pagination, document type, notes, descriptors, added terms, English-language abstract, French-language resume, number (used for document numbers other than series numbers, ISSN, ISBN, and dates), ISBN, ISSN, CODEN, mnemonic search key, bibliographic type, language, record status, and security code. Local fields for each library include National Library location code, holdings statement, call number, and local notes. System-supplied fields include birth date, update date, and a key number unique to each record. The names of all fields, with the exception of the separate abstract and resume fields, are presented in bilingual format (English and French). Most of the fields are authority-controlled, although at present these authorities are not available online. A comprehensive set of standards controlling the format of data contained in the various fields, and database-specific authority lists for corporate authors, series, and species names have been compiled.(8,9,10) The ASFIS thesaurus (unpublished revision) and the ASFIS Geographic authority list are the primary sources for terms used in the descriptors field.(11,12) Sample WAVES records are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Records are created either online, using the system's interactive input module, OLIVE, or offline, using a microcomputer-based batch upload method or by mailing formatted tapes to Infomart in Toronto. These new records are added to the database biweekly.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES: The goals and priorities of the WAVES project have evolved over the years. At present the two major priorities for the system are that it serve as a union catalogue, providing enhanced accessibility to the DFO library resource for all employees, and that it serve the functions of a retrospective bibliography of Departmental publications. Attempts are also being made to integrate WAVES activities and plans with the creation of Canadian input to the ASFA database.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND BENEFITS: Since its beginnings in 1982, over 58,000 unique records have been added to WAVES. In 1983/84, the Department's Headquarters Library was
able to acquire significant additional funding specifically to support the continued development of the database. It used this money to assume responsibility for all system storage costs and provide contract indexers in regional libraries, thereby increasing the number of libraries inputting material to the database from 3 to 8, and in some cases enabling libraries to begin to provide full subject access to material which hitherto had received little or no indexing, while at the same time avoiding duplication in indexing effort. With the input of complete runs of major Departmental publications series, a major step has been taken toward achievement of a departmental bibliography. The inclusion of a significant volume of material which predates the ASFA database makes WAVES a particularly useful database for handling fisheries and aquatic science related queries. In 1984, participating libraries agreed to divide up the major series in the database and assume responsibility for keeping them current by indexing new additions to these series, subject, of course, to the continuing availability of resources. They also agreed to expand the database to include commercial monographs, if libraries wanted to add them. (Until then, the database had consisted almost entirely of references to government documents and other grey literature.)
**Fig.3. Sample WAVES/VAGUES record, including abstract/resume.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title/Titre</td>
<td>Atlantic fishing licence directory 1985; Annuaire des permis de pêche de l'Atlantique 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pub/Editeur</td>
<td>Canada. Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Ministere des Peches et des Oceans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series/Collection</td>
<td>Canadian special publication of fisheries and aquatic sciences. 79 Publication speciale canadienne des sciences halieutiques et aquatiques. 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagination</td>
<td>5, 104, 450, 212, 52, 113 p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descipt</td>
<td>M; ANW; Canada; licences; fishing vessels; fishermen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termes/Add/Terms</td>
<td>DFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>The directory of Atlantic Coast fishermen and fishing vessels lists those who participated in the domestic commercial fishery on the Atlantic in 1984, their fishing vessels and limited entry fisheries to which they have access. Fishermen have been categorized as full-time or part-time based on their fishing activity and their dependence upon the fishery for their livelihood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume</td>
<td>L'Annuaire des permis de pêche de l'Atlantique contient la liste des pêcheurs qui ont participé à la pêche commerciale canadienne dans l'Atlantique en 1984, de même que le nom de leur bateau et les pêches à accès limité qui leur étaient accessibles. Les pêcheurs ont été repartis en pêcheurs à temps plein ou à temps partiel en fonction de leurs activités et de leur dépendance vis-à-vis la pêche comme moyen d'existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Loc/Local</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update/Mis a Jour</td>
<td>860703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keynum/Num d'Entree</td>
<td>89966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CURRENT STATUS:** WAVES has come a long way since its beginnings less than 5 years ago and has become a valuable and important tool for DFO staff. The database now serves as the
catalogue for all or much of the collections of some of the Department's libraries. (For example, it acts as a catalogue to the entire non-serial collection of the Fisheries Management library in Vancouver, and for the libraries in Nanaimo and West Vancouver it serves as the catalogue for all indexed and classified materials added in the past 4 or 5 years.) Although all database searches are at present performed by DFO library staff, immediate plans call for development of an alternative user interface, using menus, which will enable end-users to search the database themselves.

Nevertheless, the database is not yet perfect. It is, for example, by no means comprehensive, but more money is required before all libraries in the network can begin adding their records to the database and before current participants can increase their indexing efforts to include all their holdings. Although a significant start has been made in the creation of a union catalogue of DFO libraries' report literature and consultant's reports, the fact that many libraries have wisely opted to concentrate their efforts on adding unique material rather than adding their local holdings information to existing records places some limits on the database's current usefulness as a location device for interlibrary loans. Because of the federal government's current restraint programme, COFOL has been unable to persuade Departmental management to provide a continuing database administrator position. Until now the day-to-day management of the database, development of manuals, etc., and most of the indexing and keying of WAVES records has been performed by contract personnel rather than DFO library staff members, lending an air of uncertainty and lack of continuity to the project. Finally, as the number of libraries inputting records to the system, most of them using the batch-mode system because of its cost savings, has risen, the inevitable problem of duplicate records and how to deal with them has also arisen.

FUTURE: The usefulness and importance of WAVES to the Department and its libraries grows almost daily as additional material is added. There is no doubt that COFOL librarians want the database to continue. The question is how and in what form? COFOL is currently undertaking a major review of library automation requirements and options, with one option under consideration being the adoption of WAVES as the official cataloguing system for all Departmental libraries. However, no decision is expected for several months.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have described a few of COFOL's activities and accomplishments over the past 6 years. Other projects are underway. As mentioned in the section dealing with the WAVES database, the Council is currently involved in a major study of automation options with the goal of developing an overall automation strategy and plan for the entire Departmental library system. It is actively involved in the refinement of the Department's policy on the role of librarians in the purchase of books and periodicals with DFO funds. And, finally, a small task force has been set up to look at the possibility of further collection rationalization in DFO libraries.

A major reorganization is currently underway within the Department. What effect this will have on COFOL and its future activities is at present unclear. It is safe to say, however, that as long as the Department continues to exist and continues to support libraries as one of its support services, COFOL in some form will also continue to exist and will continue to work toward improving the efficiency and effectiveness of library service to DFO staff and external users.
REFERENCES

4. Ibid.