



Audit and Evaluation
Branch
Direction générale de
l'audit et de l'évaluation

AEB •
DGAÉ

Federal Evaluation of the St. Lawrence Action Plan

At a glance

January 2024



Scope and Methodology



- The federal evaluation of the St. Lawrence Action Plan (SLAP) addresses issues of design and implementation, effectiveness and alignment with government priorities over the period 2016–2017 to 2021–2022. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the requirements of Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016).
- The evaluation examined information from a variety of sources to generate observations and conclusions:



- **Review of documents and analysis of program data** including work plans, reports, and administrative and financial data.
- **Interviews with ECCC staff** who played specific key roles within SLAP during the 2016–2017 to 2021–2022 period.
- **Survey** of government participants (59 respondents) and external partners (64 respondents).
- **Comparison of major freshwater management agreements**: SLAP, Great Lakes Agreement and Lake Winnipeg Memorandum of Understanding.



Conclusions and Observations (1 of 3)

Achievements

- The program ensures effective co-management of the Agreement, resulting in the timely delivery of projects, the ongoing management of contribution programs and the use of a large proportion of available resources. The program also demonstrated its ability to adapt in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The program was successful in maintaining SLAP's relevance and effectiveness as a platform for Canada-Quebec collaboration, securing financial and operational commitments from government partners, and building new partnerships with external contributors.
- The program has had two significant positive impacts beyond its activities and products, contributing to the identification of a priority area for the protection of species at risk, and to the protection of wetlands in the Montreal Metropolitan Community (CMM).

Report on the 2016-2021 phase

- **43** interdepartmental projects aligned with the priority issues
- **35** external projects funded by ECCC through the Community Interaction Program (CIP)
- **12** ZIP (areas of prime concern) committees and Stratégies Saint-Laurent (SSL) committees funded by ECCC to support the integrated management of the St. Lawrence
- **4** key reports
- **43** additional publications made available on the [SLAP website](#)



Conclusions and Observations (2 of 3)

Main challenges

- In the absence of a clear mandate and sufficient resources to transform knowledge into action, SLAP is not making a significant contribution to departmental results on water quality and ecosystem health.
- SLAP has missed out on several opportunities to strengthen activities and outcomes, mainly due to the lack of financial resources, a shortage of qualified staff, and delays in decision-making.
- While the integrated management of the St. Lawrence (IMSL) is the most significant expenditure for ECCC and one of the main expenditures for SLAP as a whole, the contribution of IMSL implementation to departmental results is neither defined nor measured. It should be noted that ECCC supports the implementation of the IMSL. ECCC lacks clear roles and responsibilities within the water stakeholder community, which restricts the opportunities for the Department to contribute.
- The respective contributions of the ZIP Program (ECCC) and the RRTs (MELCCFP) to the integrated management of the St. Lawrence have significant similarities, creating a risk of duplication and inefficient use of resources. The ZIP Program will not be extended beyond the 2011–2026 Agreement.



Conclusions and Observations (3 of 3)

Opportunities

- In the context of the integrated management of the St. Lawrence (IMSL), the responsibility for generating positive outcomes for water quality and ecosystem health falls under the purview of regional and local water stakeholders. Redefining the role of ECCC and SLAP in integrated management may provide IMSL with a significant leverage in improving the state of the St. Lawrence.
- The Community Interaction Program does not significantly contribute to departmental results. ECCC would benefit from strengthening the contribution of the Community Interaction Program for the improvement of the state of the St. Lawrence.
- ECCC would benefit from strengthening the participation of SLAP federal partners, for example, by making financial resources available to them with a matching requirement.
- SLAP could support reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, given the interest of First Nations in participating in integrated management and improving the state of the St. Lawrence. ECCC would benefit from considering ways to strengthen the participation of First Nations communities in SLAP.
- Climate change affects the coastal areas, waters and ecosystem of the St. Lawrence, as well as the communities that live near them. ECCC would benefit from strengthening the alignment of SLAP with the priority of adapting to climate change.
- All environmental programs have social impacts. ECCC would benefit from strengthening the alignment of SLAP with the priority of achieving better results for all Canadians, including disadvantaged groups.



Trois-Pistoles River, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, Quebec



Old Port of Montreal, Quebec



Bic National Park, Quebec



Recommendations and Actions (1 of 3)

Recommendation 1

Work with government partners to strengthen the SLAP mandate; develop a performance measurement framework aligned with departmental results*; support greater participation of federal partners and improve the Community Interaction Program in order to make a significant contribution to improving water quality and the health of the St. Lawrence ecosystem.

Action 1 : Develop a strategy to redesign funding programs dedicated to improving the St. Lawrence's water quality and ecosystem health, in line with the objectives and priorities of the Canada Water Agency, while considering possible partnerships and synergies with other federal and provincial departments.

Action 2 : Promote the priorities of the strategy for redesigning funding programs dedicated to improving the St. Lawrence's water quality and ecosystem health with the St. Lawrence Action Plan partners.



* Note : On November 30, 2023, the Government tabled a legislation to establish the Canada Water Agency. Contingent upon the coming into force of the *Canada Water Agency Act*, this recommendation will apply to the future President of the Agency, who would become the senior federal official responsible for the St. Lawrence Action Plan. Upon the establishment of the Canada Water Agency by legislation, this will refer to departmental results for the Agency, which will have a Departmental Results Framework separate from that of ECCC.



Recommendations and Actions (2 of 3)

Recommendation 2

Define the expected contribution to departmental results of implementing the integrated management of the St. Lawrence.** In preparation for discussions with SLAP partners, define options for ECCC and the Canada Water Agency to participate in implementing the integrated management of the St. Lawrence.

Action 1 : Negotiate with the province the terms and conditions for supporting the Canada Water Agency in implementing integrated management, while ensuring alignment with the department's priorities and performance framework, and defining specific targets, indicators and measurable outcomes.



** Note : Preparatory work is underway to develop a Departmental Results Framework (DRF) for the Canada Water Agency, contingent on the passage and coming into force of proposed legislation currently before Parliament. The established Agency's DRF is expected to be well-aligned with the portions of ECCC's current DRF that are applicable to Canada Water Agency programs. Here "departmental results" refers to the Departmental Results Framework (DRF) for ECCC while the Canada Water Agency is within ECCC, and, in future, will refer to the DRF of the Canada Water Agency established in legislation.



Recommendations and Actions (3 of 3)

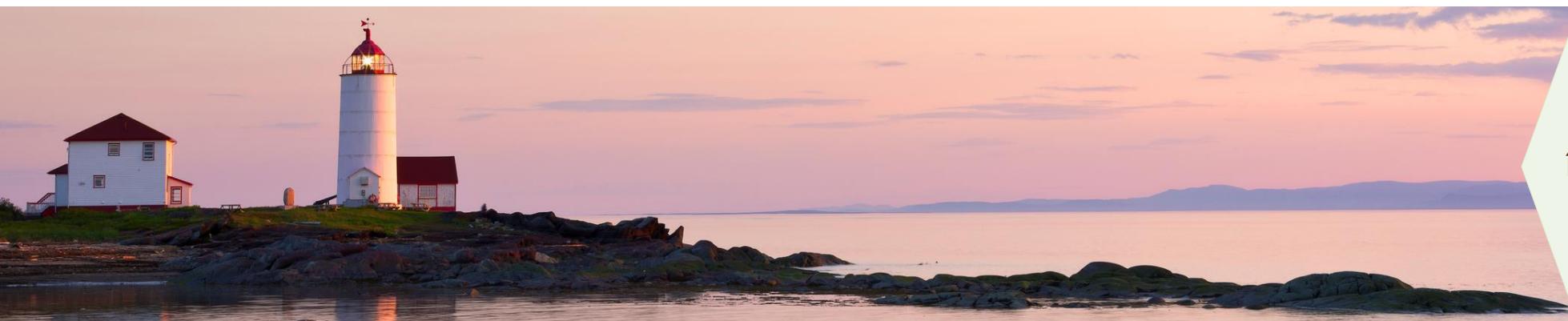
Recommendation 3

Strengthen the alignment of SLAP with the following Government of Canada horizontal priorities: reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples; achieving better outcomes for all Canadians, including marginalized groups; and adapting to climate change.

Action 1 : Implement a contribution fund dedicated to Indigenous communities.

Action 2 : Work to benefit all Canadians and disadvantaged groups of SLAP Coordination Bureau funding programs.

Action 3 : Promote the redefinition of the role of the PASL 2011-26 Climate Change Committee to a committee that is more involved in implementing intergovernmental solutions to address climate change in the Post 2026 Agreement.



Île Verte, Quebec