



## **Evaluation at a Glance**

### **Review of the St. Lawrence Program, 2011 to 2015**

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **About the program**

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Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) St. Lawrence Program was implemented through the Canada-Quebec Agreement on the St. Lawrence 2011 to 2026. It commits the federal and provincial governments to the conservation, preservation and restoration of the St. Lawrence ecosystem from a perspective of sustainable development and multi-stakeholder collaboration. This program provides leadership, oversight and coordination to the overall governance of the St. Lawrence Action Plan (SLAP) and reports results achieved jointly by the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec.

Since 1988, the governments of Canada and Quebec have worked together, through four agreements of five years each, to conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence ecosystem. In April 2016, the program was renewed until 2021, to ensure the implementation of the five-year phase of the Canada-Quebec Agreement on the St. Lawrence, from 2016 to 2021.

#### **Resource allocation**

For the period from 2011 to 2016, ECCC's financial commitments for the St. Lawrence sub-program (1.3.5) totalled \$37 million. Of this amount, \$2,250,000 was transferred to the Government of Quebec, in accordance with the terms of Appendix G of the Agreement (ECCC Financial Contribution to the Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques du Québec).

In order of importance, ECCC funds were allocated to:

- activities pertaining to le Suivi de l'état du Saint-Laurent (monitoring the state of the St. Lawrence) – 38%
- the grants and contributions programs for les Zones d'intervention prioritaires (areas of prime concern - ZIP) and le Programme Interactions communautaires (community interaction program - PIC) – 22%
- joint action programs – 19%
- logistical support and general communications – 10%

Over the same period, financial commitments from ECCC accounted for 70% of Canada's contribution and 53% of the financial commitments of both governments.



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## What the review found

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The review findings indicate that the St. Lawrence Program is unique, that it remains relevant and that it has carried out activities in accordance with its mandate.

### What worked well

The evaluation team looked at those aspects of the SLAP in which the ECCC coordinating office participated that worked well and allowed it to meet and surpass its stated outcomes.

- A collaborative framework is in place for the planning and monitoring of SLAP activities.
- Overall, by using the management structure of the Agreement, the SLAP has contributed to the collaboration, consensus building and increased engagement among key stakeholders.
- Research, awareness and protection or restoration projects were carried out, some involving community participation.
- SLAP governance is supported by available scientific and technical knowledge.
- The activities and priorities of the St. Lawrence Program are harmonized with the objectives of the SLAP and the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.
- The St-Lawrence Program is essential, since it assures that there is a long-term collaboration between the two levels of government.

### What could be improved

As with any program, there are some aspects that could have been done differently or better.

- The SLAP governance structure is clear, appropriate and effective, but it lacks the flexibility to benefit from related projects, without Canada-Quebec collaboration.
- It is important to raise awareness of the SLAP in each of the participating organizations, and by extension, to value the participation and contribution of staff members who contribute to different levels of the SLAP.
- During the last phase of the SLAP, a loss of momentum was reported in the level of participation in certain sectors.
- Joint action projects are carried out essentially with the core budgets of the participating departments. This is a risk, since these projects may be subject to ongoing budget changes.
- SLAP data and research and monitoring results are made available, but mainly to SLAP stakeholders. There is little or no sharing among groups or committees on joint action projects.
- The Agreement does not have specific targets for achieving the SLAP objectives.



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## Lessons learned

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Based on the analysis of the information collected during the evaluation project, the evaluation team developed some lessons learned on program management and governance, performance management and the accessibility of data and research results. These lessons learned were developed to help guide the St. Lawrence Program and similar programs in the future.

It is suggested that all programs:

- examine the flexibility of the governance structure and joint action planning, to be able to benefit from the interaction among related projects put forward by stakeholders
- examine the governance structure to take into account the integrated management of the program
- examine the role of the consultative committees in the governance structure
- include, where possible, scientific indicators and objectives, to meet the needs of the program more effectively
- consider developing and implementing a knowledge management strategy and databases

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## About the review

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At the outset, the Audit and Evaluation Branch's Evaluation Division committed to conducting an evaluation of all of ECCC's SLAP-related activities under the Canada-Quebec Agreement on the St. Lawrence 2011 to 2026, for the period from 2011 to 2015. However, since the St. Lawrence Program was renewed during the evaluation period, no recommendations were made for the program. Instead, the evaluation team looked at the elements of the program that worked well and those that could be improved. Based on this analysis, it then developed some lessons learned to help guide the St. Lawrence Program and similar programs in the future.