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OCEANS OF OPPORTUNITY

Breath-taking. Romantic. Destructive. Peaceful. Scary. Engaging. Frigid. Warm. Inspiring. Perplexing.

Despite our close association with the ocean in Atlantic Canada, we know little of its potential and have even less appreciation of the extent to which other nations have learned how to cultivate a relationship with the oceans adjacent to their shores.

The share of the global economy attributable to the world's oceans is 2.5 per cent. You'd expect that share would be much larger for Canada—after all, we have the largest coastline in the world and are unique in enjoying direct access to three oceans. Unfortunately, that assumption is wrong: in Canada, ocean-related industry accounts for a paltry one per cent of our economy (40 per cent of the global average). In Norway, a country one-seventh the size of Canada, the ocean sector is worth some \$132 billion. That is larger than our oil sands, automotive and aerospace industries combined.

We are also guilty of thinking that much of our ocean-related activity is world class. Again, unfortunately, that is wrong. Whether it is the wild fisheries or aquaculture or offshore oil, we import all the important innovative technologies we use and export very little, other than the product. That needs to change.

Where, you might ask, is the problem? It is certainly not the commitment to ocean-related R&D. In fact, as a region, the number of PhDs working in this sector is the second highest in the world. Is the quality of their output suspect? I doubt that's the case. I believe the issue is the lack of communication between the various participants or communities within Canada's ocean economy. The folks at work in offshore oil would have very little awareness of what research might be happening in the fisheries space, and vice versa. And how engaged are commercial interests in what's happening at MUN, or Dal or Fisheries and Oceans or inside the Navy? And to what extent are those organizations communicating among themselves? Therein lies the problem. There is little collaboration and little appreciation of the extent of what is happening within each of these silos by the other silos. More than anything, the contrast between our behavior in this respect and what exists in Norway stands out as the big differentiator.

Canada's Ocean Supercluster (a recently announced private-public partnership) seeks to be the catalyst that will bring about a fundamental change in how ocean-related industries work together. A change in which some \$300 million-plus

worth of R&D is undertaken on a collaborative basis, among and between commercial sectors involving large and small businesses and in co-operation and engagement with and by the institutional community. The focus will be on undertaking and commercializing research for those opportunities in which Atlantic Canada has the opportunity to be a global leader. And the opportunities must be large.

Those of us at work in the Supercluster have a keen desire, indeed a responsibility, to make known to the community at large what a tremendous growth engine exists for this region should we get this right. We also have to educate the community as to the scale and breadth of the ocean economy. It includes exploiting and extracting, in an environmentally responsible way, those vast oil deposits offshore which require innovative technologies to de-risk the harsh environmental and deep water challenges, to better understanding ocean bottom conditions, to identifying sensitive areas which might require particularly careful management and monitoring, through to more efficient fish or shellfish harvesting technologies, to tackling the challenges associated with moving aquaculture operations further offshore so as to expand the scope of available growth sites, to dealing with the visual and ofal contamination associated with inshore sites, to defining new diets for cultured fish, to autonomous vessels, to deep sea mining, through to obscure but very real macro visions of the digital ocean and the internet of the ocean.

There is a great but not well-known song called *I hope you dance*. It starts with “I hope you never lose your sense of wonder” and goes on to “I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean”. Amen.

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FEEDBACK

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