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Canada's ocean scientists can't get to sea:
Researchers raise concerns about ship time gap

Halifax---Canadian ocean research is suffering from a lack of available research ship time, a new report finds.

The report, commissioned by the Marine Environmental Observation, Prediction and Response Network (MEOPAR), outlines a serious gap between the amount of time researchers need to spend at sea performing valuable experiments and the availability of vessels that can be used for research, especially in Canada's offshore waters.

"Canada has outstanding scientists, world-class students and technicians and a growing number of critical issues of both national and global importance facing our oceans," said Dr. Douglas Wallace, scientific director for MEOPAR and an internationally renowned oceanographer at Dalhousie University. "But our experts are increasingly stuck in their offices."

While historically most oceans research took place on ships owned and operated by the federal government, Canada's research vessel capacity is suffering from a rapidly aging and overextended fleet, with the already-limited ship time reduced further as vessels are retired. A program to replace the aging fleet exists, but will not increase capacity or days at sea for researchers and their students.

Federally-owned assets, such as the CCGS Amundsen, a Canadian Coast Guard ship largely reserved for Arctic research, provide important access to Canadian waters. But these ships also perform vital service roles separate to their research availability, as in August 2018 when the Amundsen was directed to assist the *Akademik Ioffe* in Nunavut.

The report was part of a MEOPAR-led task team convened to provide input on the availability of vessel time for Atlantic offshore research. Task team members included academic institutions, research organizations, federal and provincial agencies, and not-for-profits familiar with offshore ocean science research in Atlantic Canada.

MEOPAR

Steele Ocean Sciences Building, 2nd Floor | Halifax, Nova Scotia | B3H 4J1
(902) 494-4384 | info@meopar.ca | www.meopar.ca



“The report identifies a major problem that affects Canada’s government, universities, private sector and NGOs alike,” said Dr. Wallace. “We lag seriously behind other developed countries and are increasingly dependent on those countries to help us research our own oceans. This is unacceptable.”

Dr. Wallace is optimistic about the opportunity to change course to address the gap.

“The report also shows that our problems are not insurmountable and suggests practical ways to move forward that won’t require decades and vast expenditure—but will require cooperation and a willingness to do things differently than in the past. If we address our problem now, Canada will be positioned to lead the world into the future.”

To schedule an interview with Dr. Wallace:

Heather Desserud
(902) 802-3447
heather.desserud@meopar.ca

ABOUT MEOPAR:

The Marine Environmental Observation, Prediction and Response Network (MEOPAR) is a national Network of Centres of Excellence, connecting top marine researchers across the country with highly-qualified personnel, partners and communities. MEOPAR aims to fund leading-edge research, train the next generation of marine research professionals, and connect research results to real-world solutions. Visit meopar.ca for more information.

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