



OMRN National Conference 2009

OMRN Futures: White Paper

Membership Discussion Document

OMRN Network Secretariat - 2009

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OMRN Futures: “White Paper”

Discussion Document

1. Purpose of the Document

This document, prepared by the OMRN Network Secretariat, presents a wide-ranging discussion on the future of the OMRN beyond the 2009 National Conference. The document is meant as a starting point for the membership in order to discuss options and opportunities for the continuation of the OMRN as a sustainable, legacy organization into the foreseeable future. The White Paper, discussed at the March 2009 meeting of the OMRN Board and Working Group Leaders, is provided to give structure to the “OMRN Futures” session to be presented in plenary on Saturday, October 24, 2009 at the OMRN Conference in Ottawa. The impetus behind the White Paper stems from the decision to end funding for the OMRN after the 2009 National Conference under the Joint Initiative funding program that the OMRN has been operating under since 2001, and more specifically since the latest two-year agreement in 2006. The Joint Initiative is a program of matched funding by Fisheries and Oceans, OHSAR (Oceans, Habitat, and Species At Risk) Sector, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Partnerships Program.

The document has been prepared for the purpose of comment and review by all OMRN members and including 2009 Conference delegates, the leadership of the OMRN, notably, the OMRN Board members, the OMRN Working Group Leaders, the DFO OHSAR (Oceans, Habitat, and Species At Risk) Sector, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The White Paper will be presented prior to the OMRN National Conference to all members via electronic distribution. The White Paper will also be accompanied by a Membership Survey to all members for their feedback. The White Paper will also be distributed to all OMRN Conference delegates in preparation for the Saturday session at the Conference.

The White Paper is presented below in sections pertaining to: (i) the future governance structure of the OMRN; (ii) alternative membership models; (iii) alternative funding models; (iv) the OMRN mandate for networking and/or research; and (v) OMRN products. Discussion on these topics is followed by a set of recommendations.

For more information on the White Paper, and for all comments, suggestions, and questions, please contact Kaitlin Fahey, OMRN Coordinator at the address listed below.

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2. Sustainability Governance Models for the OMRN

Background. In December of 2008, the OMRN Board was informed that the 5-year Renewal Plan for funding OMRN networking and research that was submitted to DFO and SSHRC in July 2008, was not to be renewed. At that time, OMRN funding (and spending) was due to be terminated, as per the Fall 2006 Joint Initiative and matched agreement between DFO and SSHRC, at the end of September 2009 (following a request for a one year spending extension). The spending extension was later moved to the end of the fiscal year, 2009-2010, i.e., March 31, 2010, in order to accommodate the 2009 OMRN National Conference that had been planned for October 2009.

To this point in time, and as specified in earlier OMRN Reports (OMRN 2008, OMRN 2007), funding for the OMRN consists of three major components attributed to networking and leveraging research. These components include (approximate percentage of total annual funding in brackets):

- 1) OMRN Network Secretariat funding (2 positions: OMRN Executive Director and OMRN Network Coordinator) (30%);
- 2) OMRN Working Groups (11 Working Groups) (50%); and
- 3) OMRN National Conference and ongoing networking activities (20%)

The loss of funding puts into jeopardy the on-going operations of the OMRN, including the OMRN Network Secretariat, the activities and line of annual funding to the OMRN Working Groups, and the operation of the OMRN National Conference.

It is important to note that since the outset of the OMRN in 2001 under the Joint Initiative with DFO and SSHRC, the OMRN has been funded and refunded three times with interim periods of upwards of one year when no funding was available. (See also OMRN 2008, Appendix A for further details on historical funding levels and operations.) During these “down times” the OMRN continued to function through the operation of a scaled down and “bare bones” secretariat, and led by a small group of academics generally recognized as the OMRN Board.

The premise of the current discussion is that the OMRN, established as a legacy group, continue as a legacy group. This means that OMRN operations consist of on-going throughout the year networking activities culminating in the OMRN National Conference every 2 years and held in Ottawa.

Premise I: *The OMRN is a legacy group.*

In order to maintain this assumed status, the OMRN requires a sustainable and ongoing governance structure. It would seem improbable to continue OMRN operations without the presence of a Network Secretariat. The following outlines alternative legacy governance models that may be considered.

- I. **Status Quo Model.** The current model includes the OMRN Chair and Board members (6 members, with limited administrative and travel compensation), a salaried OMRN Coordinator, and an OMRN Executive Director. Eleven OMRN Working Groups are defined and funded annually between \$15 thousand and \$30 thousand dollars each including additional funding from the Network Secretariat for travel for annual meetings (2) and/or the National Conference. The OMRN has used a significant portion of its funding to organize the OMRN National Conference that includes upwards of \$30 thousand dollars to support student travel and presentations to the Conference. Working Group activities include the organization of theme-based workshops, regional meetings, conference participation, and intergovernmental meetings. Total annual cost of the Status Quo model, based on the period 2007-2009 is approximately \$400,000 annually.
- II. **Minimalist Network Secretariat Model.** One such model would include the OMRN Chair and Board members (approximately 6 members, without compensation), a salaried OMRN Coordinator (at full time), and/or an OMRN Executive Director (part time). The Chair and Board would be responsible for promoting and recruiting OMRN members into tasks that may be defined by specific contracts assigned to the OMRN and its general membership networking. The OMRN Coordinator would be responsible for network operations (regular OMRN Newsletters, Bulletin Board of events, website maintenance, regular links to the Board including Conference calls, and arranging events for members' contacts and posting offers for contracts work). The Executive Director would be responsible as the key liaison person developing and dissemination contract opportunities for the membership. It is estimated that the cost of this minimalist legacy governance model would be \$100,000 per year.
- III. **Working Board "Node" Model.** Another sustainable governance model would include the OMRN Chair, a salaried OMRN Coordinator (at full time), and a working OMRN Board whose members are funded for networking and leveraged research around OMRN "nodes" (to be determined). The Board members would represent a limited number (e.g., 4-5) of high level "nodes" for which the Board members would be active in leveraging networking and research consistent with their own interests and compatible with the OMRN mandate. It is estimated that the cost of this node-based legacy governance model would be \$150,000 per year. (This model is similar to the original node structure of the OMRN 2001-2005.)
- IV. **Working Board "Production" Model.** This model differs from the above model III in that the working Board members together with the OMRN Chair and OMRN Coordinator focus on specific and pre-determined annual deliverables determined in conjunction with the funding partners who oversee, review, and are recipients of the products. Moreover, the Board members are responsible for engaging OMRN membership in the ongoing submission of their publishable production. Products may include the publication of, for example: (i) an annual "OMRN state of the oceans" report; (ii) an annual "Canada's Oceans Valuation" report; (iii) an annual "How DFO spends" document; and (iv) an annual "Oceans Policy and Research Gaps" report. Depending on the number and extent of the "products", it is estimated that the cost

of governing this legacy model would be in the range of \$200,000 per year (or \$50 thousand dollars per 4 product outputs).

Premise II: A sustainable OMRN requires base funding of upwards of \$100,000 annual to operate the Network Secretariat.

The above governance models represent a sample of possible mandates and governance arrangements that may be considered by the OMRN membership as adoptable for OMRN Futures. Please note that this list is not exhaustive of the kinds of legacy models that may be considered.

3. Alternative membership models

Currently, the OMRN boasts of over 800 on-line members who have provided their profiles to the OMRN website. These members are the *raison-d'être* of the OMRN and the reason for which the OMRN leadership (i.e., Board, Network Secretariat, and Working Group Leaders) have been constituted. The OMRN leadership is continually concerned about how best to engage and involve all members and interest parties in the delivery of the OMRN mandate re raising awareness about Canada's oceans.

Premise III: The mandate of the OMRN is to increase its membership base while providing enhanced services and networking opportunities to all its members.

With respect to the general OMRN membership, and in light of funding considerations, we consider a number of alternative membership models that exist in other organizations. These include:

- A. **Membership Status Quo – Free Membership.** OMRN members are invited to join the network free of charge. Member privileges include web-based information access to fellow OMRN members' profiles, and access to student research activities, and oceans organizations (industry, ENGOs, and communities), as well as direct membership in OMRN Working Groups. It is suggested that this model of free membership is most consistent with the networking mandate of the OMRN and efforts to disseminate freely the work of researchers, students, industry, and government around the issues of oceans and the human dimension.
- B. **Membership Fees.** Charging membership fees would require the reconciliation of funds and an accounting of the fees and use of funds to be reported publicly to members, as well as an official registration of the organization as a members' funded group. The charging of fees would require a clear delineation of value-for-membership and would also necessitate registration and payment of taxes (GST) with the government, as well as other overhead issues. It is not certain how such membership fees are handled within the University accounting system and/or what impact fees may have on alternative research funding options (e.g., SSHRC or NSERC).

- C. **Professional Accreditation and Fees.** This option would move the OMRN toward a professional status that would be passed along on the membership as per a defined level of accreditation. A significant amount of effort would be required to define this status for which eligible members could be welcomed, accredited, and charged a fee for on-going annual membership status. This option would uniquely define the “brand” of the OMRN, but would also make it an exclusive style operation – pros and cons of the approach.

Membership fees would be one means of sustaining the Network Secretariat and hiring the OMRN Coordinator and Executive Director. Assuming 500 paying members (from among the existing 800+ membership), an annual fee of \$100 per member would support (approximately) the OMRN Coordinator’s activities at near full-time capacity.

The alternative membership models presented above represent a sample of possible membership arrangements that are available in other organizations, and may be considered by the OMRN as adoptable membership options for OMRN Futures. As before, membership suggestions are not exhaustive of the kinds of options that may be considered in general.

The following section on “funding alternatives” also considers the relative impact of membership funds in support of overall OMRN activities.

4. Funding alternatives

The OMRN 5-year Plan, 2009-2014 (OMRN 2008), submitted for review by the current funders in July of 2008, was not accepted as the basis for sustainable and continued funding for the OMRN. Accordingly, the OMRN now finds itself in a position that remaining funds from the 2006-2008 2-year agreement may be spent only up to the end of the 2009-2010 fiscal year, March 31, 2010. After this time, the Working Groups will be unfunded, as well as the salaried positions of the OMRN Network Secretariat (Coordinator and Executive Director).

- (i) **Funding Status Quo.** Since its inauguration in 2001, the OMRN has been variously funded under a matched funding equation and joint initiative by DFO and SSHRC. The 5-year Renewal Plan for 2009-2014 (OMRN 2008) was designed to continue and augment the joint initiative structure for a new OMRN that would include a defined research program as well as networking. It has been made clear to the OMRN that this arrangement is not conducive with current government funding possibilities in the DFO OHSAR Sector. Instead the Sector voiced its preference, under the current circumstances, for a decentralized system by which it would be contacting individual experts to carry out research on specifically defined work tasks. Thus, for the present time, the possibility of a joint initiative developing for the continuation of the OMRN within the DFO OHSAR Sector is unlikely.

- (ii) **Pan-departmental Funding Initiatives.** Throughout its varied funding history, It has been suggested to the OMRN Leadership that DFO is not interested in maintaining full government support for the organization. Rather DFO have encouraged the OMRN to seek out funding assistance from other oceans-related government departments. While efforts have been made in this regard, funding from government departments outside of DFO is typically forthcoming in small amounts (less than \$50 thousand dollars) and usually for specific tasks, e.g., an OMRN organized seminar or workshop event. A more concerted effort focused around the oceans mandate pitched to all related departments may yet have better results.
- (iii) **Foundation Funding.** The OMRN has examined opportunities for funding from Foundations including the Moore, PEW, and Gordon Foundations (all in the U.S.). In the current time, economic considerations have reduced the fundability of initiatives like the OMRN due to a fall in the valuation of these Foundations. This is anticipated to be a short term decline and opportunities for OMRN funding by Foundations could be a welcome opportunity.
- (iv) **OMRN-as-ENGO Funding.** Currently the OMRN holds the “middle ground” between a strictly government agency, and a completely independent operation. This middle ground enables the OMRN to think and act independently, but with responsibility for its action toward beign best able to influence policy and improve the human dimension. Alternatively, the OMRN could institute itself as strictly an Environmental-NGO with funds coming from like-minded Foundations, and from donations by the public. It is likely that this stance would hinder the ability of the OMRN to engage further in joint initiatives with federal funding agencies, e.g., SSHRC or NSERC.
- (v) **Combined Funding options.** As noted above, selling membership fees may be considered as a possible sustainable support mechanism However, it unlikely that membership fees alone could support anything but a minimalist operating secretariat . Other funding options however, may be combined with membership fees to sustain an OMRN Network Secretariat and limited program activities. These options, including a smaller joint initiative fund involving DFO and multiple sectors (e.g., Science, and Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, and Policy), and funding from other oceans-related departments (e.g., Transport Canada, NRCan, Environment Canada, Parks Canada, Agriculture Canada), combined with contributions from selected Foundations (typically related to specified work), and the public, may present a lucrative opportunity for a well-defined and productive OMRN.

Premise IV: The OMRN requires a new funding arrangement to ensure sustainable operations.

The above funding models represent a sample of possible arrangements that may be considered by the OMRN as adoptable funding alternatives for OMRN Futures. Please note, as before, that this list in not exhaustive of all the kinds of funding possibilities that may be considered for the OMRN.

5. Networking and/or Research

The current mandate of the OMRN under the funding arrangements of the DFO-SSHRC Joint Initiative, require that the OMRN develop and disseminate oceans issues to the public via the activity of networking nation wide and leveraging and support ongoing research. The separation of networking and research to date is an indication of funding availability and the recognized gap in government research on the human dimension.

The issue of whether the OMRN is uniquely a “networking” organization, for which it was originally funded under the DFO-SSHRC Joint Initiative has always been in question. At the Halifax Board meeting in July 2007, the funders (DFO and SSHRC together) recommended strongly that the OMRN develop and propose a joint networking and research program with the idea of providing the OMRN with a sustainable funding horizon over 5 years (to 2014).

In July 2008, after consultations with the OMRN Board and the OMRN Working Group Leaders, the Network Secretariat presented DFO and SSHRC with the OMRN 5-year Renewal Plan for 2009-2014 (OMRN 2008) in anticipation of the termination of the 2006-2008 network joint initiative funding period. As had been suggested, the 5-year plan included the presentation of four key research areas – on top of OMRN on-going networking activities. The research thrust was designed for and aligned with the fundamental preoccupations of the DFO OHSAR Sector.

To this point, the OMRN has been funded to develop and encourage networking activities in the regions and for the enhanced awareness of oceans issues in communities and among governments (provincial and federal). While OMRN encouraged and leveraged research activities of its leaders and the membership, it has never been fully funded specifically for a research program such as was proposed in OMRN(2008).

Premise V: The full OMRN mandate requires that it deliver on networking activities nationally, as well as research output and deliverables unique to the OMRN.

A fundamental questions remain as to the appropriate mandate of the OMRN vis-à-vis the networking function (and leveraging research), or the combined networking and research functions. Until this fundamental question is resolved, then the OMRN may not be fully realized.

6. OMRN ownership and products

The OMRN Board and OMRN Working Group Leaders have often commented on the inability of the OMRN to point to substantive product outputs that may be uniquely identified as a consequence of the OMRN itself. In fact, as evidenced by the OMRN (2008, 2007) reports, OMRN members are heavily involved in producing research and results at the highest levels. However, it is recognized that many of these works, while done under the leadership of OMRN members, are not explicitly recognized as OMRN products.

As such, there is some pressure for the need for OMRN ownership around products that represent its viewpoints and feedback. Such products may take the form of regular policy statements that are directed at existing and/or new oceans-related policy proposals for which OMRN members have critical and constructive prospective to provide to local, provincial and federal governments.

Alternatively, the OMRN is encouraged to develop its own line of “products” that can be considered as “arm’s length” critical pieces designed to develop, present, and provoke policy makers and managers. For example, it has been suggested that the OMRN prepare policy pieces such as “The OMRN State of the Ocean Report for Canada”, “The OMRN Oceans Valuation Report”, and “The OMRN Global Oceans Review”. These reports may be done on a regular (e.g., annual) basis, or on a longer time frame requiring a more focused and comprehensive perspective, e.g., every two years.

The idea of explicit OMRN ownership in products is presented as a heightened approach to establishing the uniqueness and raison d’être of the OMRN that would doubtless be useful for future funding opportunities. Discussion on the need for OMRN products is presented in the discussion document for further analysis and consideration of OMRN Futures.

Premise VI: The OMRN will be best-served in the future by identifying a focused set of unique products and deliverables that define it explicitly.

7. Recommendations

This discussion paper is prepared as a starting point for a wider discussion among OMRN Board and Network Secretariat members, the OMRN Working Group Leaders, the OMRN Futures Task Group, and the full OMRN membership.

The following recommendations, presented in point form below, follow from the list of premises presented in the discussion paper above. Members are encouraged to discuss, suggest, and question these recommendations toward find a consensus position for the OMRN Futures Session at the Ottawa conference.

Recommendation I: Maintain the OMRN as an ongoing legacy network.

Recommendation II: Seek funding levels of at least \$100,000 annually toward maintaining and operating the Network Secretariat through alternative and combined funding arrangements involving governments departments, research funding agencies (SSHRC and NSERC), and the evolving membership.

Recommendation III: Seek to increase the OMRN membership base while providing enhanced services and networking opportunities to all OMRN members.

Recommendation V: Establish the future OMRN with mandates for (i) networking activities nationally, and (ii) defined research output and deliverables unique to the OMRN.

Recommendation VI: Seek renewal of the structure of the OMRN by reducing the number of theme-based topics and by turning over the current OMRN leadership in order to infuse new people and enthusiasm into the organization.

8. References

OMRN 2008. OMRN 5-Year Renewal Plan, 2009-2014. Submitted to DFO OHSAR Sector and SSHRC, Partnerships Program, July 2008. 100p.+appendices.

OMRN 2007. OMRN Annual Report for 2006-2007 to SSHRC and DFO. Submitted to DFO OHSAR Sector and SSHRC, Partnerships Program, September 19, 2007. Ottawa. 44p.+appendices. OMRN Website link: <http://www.omrn-rrgo.ca/index.php?action=publications.index> .

9. Appendix A - OMRN Futures: White Paper – Terms of Reference

The March 2009 meeting of OMRN Board members and Working Group Leaders agreed that the OMRN should work toward preparing a position paper on the future of the OMRN after the 2009 National Conference, and the coincident end of partnership funding. The March meeting agreed to the following:

- 1) Formation of the OMRN Futures Task Group tasked to prepare a “White Paper” on options and alternatives for the continuation and governance of the OMRN beyond October 2009.
- 2) A tentative list of OMRN members were identified and recommended as The OMRN Futures Task Group and included the following:
 - **Ratana Chuenpagdee** (OMRN WG Chair of Oceans and Coastal Indicators) ,
 - **Derek Armitage** (OMRN WG Chair of Adaptive Co-management),
 - **Nathan Young** (OMRN WG Chair of Socioeconomics of Climate Change),
 - **Rob Huebert**, University of Calgary (OMRN member - to be invited),
 - **Neil Ridler**, UNBSJ (invited OMRN member – to be invited),
 - **Kate Bigney**, PhD Candidate, Dalhousie University, OMRN Board Member-Student Director,
 - **Dan Lane**, OMRN Chair

These members and others to be designated are invited to read and respond to the White Paper (this document) and to participate in the OMRN Futures session scheduled for Saturday, October 24, 2009, the final day of the 2009 OMRN National Conference in Ottawa.

- 3) Draft Agenda of the White Paper:
 - I. Prepare a discussion document among the OMRN Futures Task Group by June 29, 2009;
 - II. Prepare a survey/questionnaire based on the discussion document for presentation to the OMRN membership by July 30, 2009;
 - III. Develop options for a Sustainability Governance Model for the OMRN;
 - IV. Examine alternative membership models (including unpaid and paid memberships, chapter in a professional or non-governmental association, status quo);
 - V. Investigate funding alternatives for the OMRN (including foundation and NGO funding) ;
 - VI. Consider networking and/or research mission for the OMRN and the importance of government-related policy relevance;
 - VII. Establish the need for OMRN ownership and products (e.g., define policy pieces such as “OMRN State of the Ocean Report” for Canada, “OMRN Oceans Valuation Report”, etc.)
 - VIII. Prepare a statement of recommendations based on the discussion document, the members’ survey, and subsequent follow-up for presentation to OMRN members by October 1.
- 4) The OMRN Futures Task Group will present the findings of the membership survey and the White Paper recommendations to the 2009 OMRN National Conference “Wrap-up Session” (item 4.7 above) on Saturday, October 24, 2009 from 8h30 to 10h30.