

## INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

### LYNE MORISSETTE - CEO, M - EXPERTISE MARINE AND M - MÉDIAS

*Lyne Morissette is an Ecologist specializing in marine mammals and ecosystem functioning. She is the President and CEO of M - Expertise Marine and the production company M – Médias, in addition to being an Associate Professor of Marine Ecology at the Institut des Sciences de la Mer à Rimouski (ISMER).*

*Growing up on the banks of the St. Lawrence, Lyne developed a fascination with oceans as a child and has since worked to protect them for future generations. She has a PhD in Zoology from the University of British Columbia and two post-doctoral degrees: one in Nature Conservation from Arizona State University and one in Biodiversity from University of Guelph. Lyne's expertise is recognized worldwide and her work has been published in the most prestigious journals, including Science. She has travelled the world over to pursue her research and is actively involved in Canada, the Caribbean, Africa and Scandinavia.*

*The recipient of the Medal of the National Assembly of Québec for her contribution to advancing marine science and the recipient of the Canadian Wildlife Federation's Rolland Michener Conservation Award, she is currently working in the media to make the St. Lawrence's beauties known so as to better to protect them.*



**Ms. Morissette, on February 7, the federal government announced a new plan for protecting North Atlantic right whales. As a marine mammal specialist and Marine Information Bureau expert, could you explain to us what this new plan adds compared to the measures implemented in 2018 and to what extent such measures are effective?**

Like last year, from April 28 to November 15, a 10-knot speed limit will be imposed for vessels of 20 metres or more travelling in the western Gulf of St. Lawrence. The speed restriction zone and dates may be changed as needed, depending on the presence of North Atlantic right whales (NARW) in the region and any problem involving marine safety.

Once again, vessels will be authorized to travel at safe speeds in certain parts of the two shipping lanes located north and south of Anticosti Island, when no whales are in the zone.

A mandatory 15-day slow-down to 10 knots will be implemented in the appropriate shipping lanes

when a NARW is spotted.

New, this year, is that, based on consultations with the industry and the scientific database on the presence of NARWs, two changes have been made in the speed restriction zone: the south-east corner of the speed restriction zone around the Magdalen Islands has been removed and, to reduce impacts on the shipping industry, if no whales are sighted, vessels will be authorized to travel at safe speeds in a bigger zone located north of Anticosti Island up to the continent.

*"The measures' effectiveness depends directly on vessel compliance with these regulations. To ensure vessels' compliance, I feel it is absolutely necessary that these measures be developed with them...that the industry be part of the process upstream."*

**Based on your environmental mediation experience, can you tell us how it is possible to get stakeholders whose interests and fields of expertise may differ, and even diverge, to find a solution that is satisfactory for all parties?**

When I started working, I modelled marine ecosystems in a fisheries context. Then, I worked a lot on migratory species, like the humpback whale, which can travel more than 5000 km between their feeding area here in Québec, in summer, and their breeding grounds in the Caribbean, in winter. In both cases, I was faced with issues of collaboration, because this was the only way to be effective in the actions taken. Having a healthy ecosystem required collaboration between experts on the different species present in this ecosystem and protecting humpback whales required collaboration between the different activity sectors and even countries where these whales are found in the course of their life cycle.

***"Environmental mediation is just that: working together to find the best possible solutions."***

When we try to protect Nature, we have to remember that humans are part of it and that not all involved have the same interests.

*"The key to success is to use each stakeholder's field knowledge to get the best picture of the situation and, especially, to work together so that our actions are understood, decided jointly and effective."*

In most of the ocean-related challenges we currently face (be it whales that are endangered, climate change or plastic in our oceans), we don't have the luxury of working in isolated "silos" or time or energy to lose in working against one another. The only way is through joint efforts and collaboration.

**In 2018, 99.67% of merchant ships complied with vessel speed reduction measures in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Based on what you see elsewhere in the world, how would you describe the commitment of the ship owners/operators whose vessels travel in the Gulf?**

The Canadian example is impressive and a source of pride worldwide. To me, it's a wonderful example of working together. We can make laws, regulations and strategies to protect Nature but if we don't do so with the industry's involvement, we won't find the right solutions and it won't work.

*"Since I began working in the Gulf of St. Lawrence right whale file, I've been delighted to see the shipping industry's key involvement. Its members are often the first to suggest that scientists, government departments, ENGOs and ship owners/operators sit down together to discuss solutions."*

Commitment and compliance with protection measures begins with mutual empathy vis-à-vis the issues, both for the ships operating in this ecosystem and for the scientists trying to protect the species inhabiting it.

This coexistence is made possible by understanding and dialogue between ship owners/operators, scientists and managers. The solutions are in the actions the various stakeholders take and how serious they are about them. With an almost-perfect compliance rate, we have proof that ship owners/operators know their sector and their ecosystems, that their field knowledge is valuable, and that our success in protecting species depends on their collaboration.

**How do you think science and technology can help St. Lawrence users find means allowing them to continue their activities while protecting North Atlantic right whales?**

**In your opinion, what are the current limitations that prevent more from being done?**

In recent years, I've been fortunate enough to witness extraordinary stories of coexistence on the seas, inspiring actions that inspire others and that, ultimately, constitute effective solutions that make a real difference for our endangered species and the ecosystems they depend on. This is true for the right whale in the Gulf...the close collaboration between the industry– fisheries and shipping–that contributes its knowledge and ideas to work with scientists and engineers.

This science-technology-industry model is also a win-win when it comes to issues like pollution by plastics, another challenge, where the tourism industry is working hand in hand with citizens, schools and scientists to ensure the St. Lawrence's health. I'm referring to [Défi Saint-Laurent](#), a new project, for which I'm the proud ambassador, implemented on March 22, 2019.

In answer to your question, I'd say that scientists are good at describing the issues but that their role ends there. To my mind, this is one of the limitations that prevents things from doing more. Science will not solve everything. We need to think further. The other major limitation we need to overcome is working in "silos". Silos mean we sometimes duplicate efforts, time and energy to do the same things. The last limitation that I can think of is apathy...not knowing each party's challenges and realities.

*"Education must be central to our approaches. As Commander Jacques-Yves Cousteau said "We protect what we love, and we love what we know". Let's talk to each other and work together to make our oceans healthy."*



Credits: Charlotte Horvath, Marine mammals observation network