

INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH



SYLVAIN LAFRANCE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INNOVATION MARITIME



Sylvain Lafrance has been active in the maritime sector for more than 30 years. He started out working as a researcher in the field of fisheries for a few years, notably in West Africa. For 25 years now, he has headed organizations involved in both economic development and applied research. Mr. Lafrance has been the Executive Director of [Innovation maritime](#) since summer 2013. Based in Rimouski and active since 2001, IMAR seeks to contribute to the development of the marine sector through innovation. Its areas of activity are marine engineering, environmental technologies, marine intelligence, marine transport/navigation and underwater intervention. At IMAR, some 30 individuals are actively involved in applied research. Mr. Lafrance holds a Bachelor's degree in Science and a Master's degree in Marine Resources Management.

Question 1: Where does the idea behind the Maritime Information System (MIS) project come from?

Answer 1: This initiative was born of the desire to give the maritime industry a high-performance, centralized tool for collating, processing and disseminating data on vessel and cargo movements on the St. Lawrence River.

Such a tool seemed necessary for better understanding the dynamics of goods transport, the various ports' unique features and the complementarity between ports in order,

ultimately, to strengthen Québec's port network. In 2011, Statistics Canada stopped compiling and regularly disseminating data on the maritime industry. SODES and Innovation maritime (IMAR) are the two main MIS project proponents.

The five Canadian port authorities (CPA) located in Québec are closely associated with the project, collaborating by making available various data related to the goods transiting through their facilities.

Although it was possible to find this data here and there in different organizations, it was not collated



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and processed in a consolidated manner so as to provide a clear understanding of the sector's evolution. The idea behind the MIS was to make quality, up-to-the-minute data on the maritime sector available to meet a range of needs and accommodate multiple users whose work depends on having access to solid maritime transport-related data.

Phase 1 of the MIS project began in 2016 and allowed a web interface to be developed, pooling data and indicators related to shipping traffic in Québec in addition to disseminating 15 newsletters providing up-to-date pictures of vessel and goods traffic as well as analyses of maritime sector-related themes.

This first phase was made possible through funding from three organizations: Transport Canada, the Secrétariat aux Affaires maritimes and SODES, not to mention in-kind contributions from industry partners.

Question 2: How does the Québec government's announcement allow concurrent rollout of both the MIS and the Smart Trade Corridor?

Answer 2: Since the project's inception, it has been agreed that MIS development will proceed in stages in order to establish solid bases of trust and collaboration between the partners.

The work is done by respecting the confidentiality of certain data and by respecting the partners' desire to disclose certain more sensitive information or not. Consequently, IMAR is not

using the full potential of the different databases in terms of processing and analysis.

The funding the Québec government announced recently (\$900 000 over 3 years) will, in Phase 2, allow MIS content to be significantly enriched, making it THE reference for vessel traffic-related data and information on the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes.

This second phase aims to cover the entire Québec port network, to enrich the content of the analyses offered via the MIS on an ongoing basis, to improve the web interface functionalities and to broaden the MIS' geographic range.

Among other things, implementation of these different actions presupposes expanding the network of partners, bolstering the development capacity of the team associated with the project and adopting new approaches for analyzing the diverse data available on maritime transport on the St. Lawrence.

A Smart Trade Corridor is possible only if we have quality data, which can allow the development of various applications to optimize vessel traffic or improve navigation safety, for example.

Question 3: What are this tool's advantages for the maritime industry?

Answer 3: With its critical mass of quality, up-to-the-minute data, the MIS can serve as the basic tool for the maritime industry's different partners wishing to conduct forward-looking analyses,



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assess commercial opportunities, track the sector's evolution, better understand logistics chains, make investment decisions or promote the industry. With the industry and the data available, we intend to develop performance indicators that will provide an all-round picture of the sector.

Ultimately, we hope that the MIS will be able to act as a data supplier for public organizations concerned by maritime transport and the economic, social and environmental issues linked to its development. Once a year, with SODES, we plan to produce a reference document that will give an updated profile of the sector.

Question 4: Once the funding has been secured, what are the possibilities for developing or expanding this tool?

Answer 4: It will be possible to extend the MIS' geographic scope to cover the entire St. Lawrence – Great Lakes Trade Corridor. The data will enable us to have a good understanding of vessels' origin-destination.

We also plan to build bridges with other databases (on ground and rail transport) for a more global (multimodal) understanding of goods transport. We will seek to better understand logistics chains for the key goods transiting through the St. Lawrence.

Already, Innovation maritime has databases comprising millions of records and providing a detailed history of vessel movements. Today, such databases can be used for more in-depth

analyses by using approaches involving artificial intelligence.

In short, MIS Phase 1 allowed us to establish good bases for collaboration and to implement the groundwork of a system for collating, analyzing and disseminating information.

For the time being, it is a work in progress. With the support of various partners and the new Québec government funding, we intend to make the MIS a benchmark platform for maritime information.