

As ice melts in Far North, opportunities abound to advance Canada's oceanic laws

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Thinning ice resulting from climate change in the Arctic is happening far faster than experts previously imagined. With it come new global shipping routes and growing interest in natural resource development and regional tourism. These changes, says a leading expert in oceanic governance, are urging Canada to advance its laws on shipping regulation, ocean governance and marine biodiversity protection.

David VanderZwaag, Canada Research Chair in Ocean Law and Governance, says that, although Canada faces growing challenges in Arctic governance given increased regional activity and mounting interest in developing the region's oil, gas and mineral industries, it has the potential to lead the way by how it governs its oceans and adopts practices of [sustainable development](#) in the Far North.

"There is a huge doughnut hole in the central [Arctic Ocean](#) that's beyond all the countries' coastal jurisdiction," says VanderZwaag. "As every country has the right to a 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone, there's a big gap in the middle, which could potentially turn out to be problematic. It's an area, however, where Canada could demonstrate its leadership."

VanderZwaag's work is wide-reaching and addresses ocean law, research, governance and policy—areas where Canada could prove to be an international leader. His research looks at how and where Canada can build on its strengths in oceanic governance. Such strengths include the Oceans Act of 1996—a first-of-its-kind comprehensive international act

that set out a roadmap for dealing with future challenges in international oceanic governance.

Another area of success Vanderzwaag is researching is Canada's solid foundation of strict environmental standards for shipping. He is currently working on a book that covers Canadian and Russian approaches to the law of the sea and Arctic [Ocean](#) governance.

VanderZwaag's work is already helping to strengthen Canada's law and policy net for protecting—even saving—marine species at risk. He recently co-authored a report for the Royal Society of Canada on how to better sustain Canada's [marine biodiversity](#). He has also published extensively on the precautionary approach to decision-making, which can be a powerful risk-assessment tool for policy-makers in evaluating the environmental impact of development proposals.

Vanderzwaag has also published recommendations to improve the governance system for the international control of toxic chemicals.

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VanderZwaag will discuss his research and answer questions from the press as part of the Canada Press Breakfast on the theme of Arctic and Oceans, which is being held at AAAS in Vancouver. The breakfast will be held in Room 306 of the Vancouver Convention Centre at 8 a.m. on

February 17, 2012, and will feature Canadian research experts across natural sciences and engineering, health, and social sciences and humanities.

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