

Fishery Audit: 2022 Recommendations

As the country with the world's longest coastline and coastal communities that rely on healthy marine ecosystems, Canada has the responsibility to modernize marine resource management and waste no more time in the pursuit of restoring ocean abundance. The government needs to match their response to the urgency of the situation, by using the knowledge and tools already available to manage stocks so that there are more stocks in the healthy zone, few in the cautious zone and all stocks in the critical zone are managed under good-quality rebuilding plans.

Recommendations

In the year ahead, Oceana Canada calls on DFO to leverage the knowledge and policy tools already available to deliver on commitments and implement real change on the water. This means:

1. **Implement rebuilding regulations for all depleted stocks:** Canada's *Fisheries Act* now requires that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) takes action to rebuild depleted fisheries, and new rebuilding regulations now define how rebuilding will be accomplished. Because these regulations only apply to stocks prescribed in the Fish Stock Provisions (FSP) and because only one batch of stocks has been prescribed to date, all depleted stocks should be prescribed in upcoming batches. Specifically, DFO must:
 - a. Implement eight new rebuilding plans by 2022/2023 plus three new rebuilding plans (Pacific salmon) and three revised rebuilding plans by 2023/2024, per the FSP;
 - b. Prescribe all remaining critical and cautious stocks in upcoming batches subject to the Fish Stock Provisions and develop corresponding new rebuilding plans;
 - c. Assign status and develop limit reference points (LRPs) for all uncertain stocks, using methods across the data spectrum and prioritizing development for 16 key stocks¹;
 - d. Develop LRPs for forage fish according to the Policy on New Fisheries for Forage Species as a threshold to serious harm experienced by both target and ecologically dependent species (currently, 5/17 forage stocks lack LRPs, 11/17 lack upper stock references, and the health status of 7/17 is uncertain).
2. **Make decisions about wild fish based on science and Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** To uphold its commitments to truth and reconciliation, the Canadian government must meaningfully engage with Indigenous organizations to make decisions informed by Indigenous evidence, practices, and knowledge systems, as well as the best available science². Specifically, DFO must:
 - a. Reform DFO's decision-making structure to be more accountable and transparent, in ways that promote holistic forms of co-governance;

¹ Schijns, R. & Rangeley, R. (2022). New legal requirements for rebuilding Canada's fisheries and priorities for depleted and uncertain stocks. In: *Fishery Audit 2022: Unlocking Our Potential for Abundant Oceans*. Oceana Canada.

² See Paul (2022) for detailed recommendations on Indigenous priorities for rebuilding fisheries. Available online: <https://oceana.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/Indigenous-Fisheries-Priorities-2021-Workshop-Report-15September2022-FINAL.pdf>

- b. Implement collaborative fisheries management agreements between the Canadian government and Indigenous organizations; and
 - c. Transform fisheries management with new approaches that centre on sustainability and ecosystem management and recognize the ecological and cultural significance of fish as more than just a commodity to be extracted.
3. **Integrate ocean ecosystem considerations:** DFO must take into account the ecosystem impacts of fisheries decisions, aggressively work to rebuild depleted forage fish, and address the vulnerability of species and habitats to climate change impacts. Specifically, DFO must:
- a. Assess vulnerability and climate risk of all populations to identify the species, location, and timelines necessary to prioritize resources that enable climate-smart management for stocks most vulnerable to climate change;
 - b. Include a new section in DFO Science Advisory Reports or related documents titled “Climate Change Considerations” that explicitly summarizes available knowledge on ecosystem changes and the mechanisms for including relevant information in fisheries science and advice;
 - c. Ensure that the effects of climate change are considered consistently in the science that informs fisheries management decisions through integrating environmental variability into both assessments and advice;
 - d. Implement a long-term National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy that adopts Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Approaches and risk-based frameworks; and
 - e. Implement management decisions and strategies for all forage fish that account for the role of forage fish in the ecosystem and incorporate ecosystem-based principles in line with the Policy on New Fisheries for Forage Species.
4. **Count everything caught in a fishery** – including for recreational and bait purposes – and account for all sources of fishing in management decision-making. Specifically, DFO must:
- a. Increase the following efforts to implement the Fishery Monitoring Policy to ensure all commercial fisheries have sufficient monitoring to provide dependable estimates of fishing mortality from all sources:
 - i. Provide dedicated operating resources to implement the policy over the next five years to ensure all major fish stocks have their fishery monitoring programs reviewed under its standards;
 - ii. Advance monitoring activities identified in the Sustainable Fisheries Framework Work Plan, prioritizing stocks suspected of having issues with the quality of fishery monitoring data, and including at least five stocks for complete implementation in each DFO Region every year until the policy has been implemented for all major stocks; and
 - iii. Starting in 2022, publish an annual report to the Minister that provides performance measurements evaluating progress towards achieving the policy objectives for all major stocks, along with targets and timelines for nationwide implementation.

To address these high-level priorities and accelerate the implementation of Canada's Sustainable Fisheries Framework, Oceana Canada calls on DFO to complete the key actions outlined in the checklist at [Oceana.ca/FisheryAudit2022](https://oceana.ca/fisheryaudit2022) within the next year. This includes fulfilling ongoing commitments and those that have been delayed from previous work plans, as well as those scheduled to be completed this fiscal year.