

Becoming more involved in habitat protection and restoration through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy is the top technical priority for First Nations after stock assessments. There is also a lot of support for more research and study on the cumulative effects of other industries on habitat and waterways, and for species restoration (both species at risk and species in decline).

Officials in the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program should also work with the Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation Directorate to implement the fish and fish habitat protection and restoration-specific and -related recommendations made during Indigenous Program Review:

- ✓ Connect Indigenous communities to any fish and fish habitat protection and restoration funding programs and related economic opportunities
- ✓ Connect Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management groups (AAROMs) and Indigenous communities to any technically relevant fish and fish habitat protection funding programs, such as the Coastal Restoration Fund and Indigenous Habitat Partnership Program
- ✓ Recognize AAROMs and Indigenous communities that are ready to perform third-party fish and fish habitat protection and restoration contracts by enabling them to pursue procurement opportunities outside program funding
- ✓ Help raise awareness and promote AAROM services and the AAROM network
- ✓ Support Indigenous community outreach programs which align education and career progression paths for habitat-related science, technical 'field' activities, and management
- ✓ Identify areas of potential collaboration with Indigenous communities to help build capacity
- ✓ Enable science-to-science 'field' partnerships, access to labs, and equipment sharing through collaborative agreements with AAROMs and Indigenous communities
- ✓ Hold joint departmental–Indigenous technical 'field' and enforcement (and inspection) training opportunities and share information on program-led training courses and institutes with the Department's co-delivery partners
- ✓ Use the science, data and knowledge generated by AAROMs and Indigenous communities in decision-making and management planning processes for fish and fish habitat protection and restoration
- ✓ Establish fish and fish habitat protection and restoration data-sharing agreements and parameters with AAROMs and Indigenous communities
- ✓ Invest in Indigenous knowledge systems and enable or participate in AAROM networking opportunities designed to learn from best practises
- ✓ Build on examples where Indigenous knowledge has been properly reflected in decision-making
- ✓ Enable AAROMs and Indigenous communities to implement restoration plans for culturally significant species by aligning them with habitat-related programs
- ✓ Enable AAROM groups and communities to undertake technical research activities related to fish habitat protection to help address local concerns impacting section 35.1 food security
- ✓ Support greater access by Indigenous communities to programs, tools, protocols and training that support their participation in environmental monitoring and decision-making
- ✓ Regularly exchange information with Indigenous groups, communities, and fishery guardians about changes to legislation, regulations, policies and programs; especially, what the changes mean for their work

Indigenous Program Review Recommendations

- ✓ Align investments related to fish and fish habitat protection program employment, including environmental monitoring, habitat inspection, and restoration, to help communities offer career progression opportunities to their technical and enforcement personnel
- ✓ Designate Indigenous managers, technicians and/or fishery guardians as habitat inspectors, if desired by communities, and identify other potential designation authorities in legislation or regulations
- ✓ Recognize that Indigenous fishery guardians and officers are better placed to perform enforcement services in their territories
- ✓ Be accountable for changing fish and fish habitat practises, programs, and policies (in that order) to demonstrate the priority rights of Nations to fish before commercial and recreational users, including internal policies directing the responsibilities of habitat management officials
- ✓ Participate in any federal–provincial–territorial–Indigenous teams set up to ensure priority rights are respected across jurisdictions and cross-designation issues are resolved
- ✓ Be accountable for co-managing the protection of fish and fish habitat with Indigenous communities

Other Indigenous Program Review recommendations could be considered through the lens of the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program:

- ✓ Apply Indigenous-led conservation decisions in territorial waterways to non-Indigenous activities which occur in or alongside these waterways
- ✓ Participate in annual decision-making workshops put together for First Nations and departmental staff in resource management and science to advance co-management of fish and fish habitat protection
- ✓ Consider helping IARD as they pursue new ways to fund the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program and to increase the number of designated fishery guardians in more communities, such as:
 - ✓ offering habitat inspector designation opportunities to communities
 - ✓ helping fund the development of tools and applied technologies to advance the work of designated fishery guardians

The priority rights of Indigenous peoples must be reflected in departmental programs, practises and policies because this is a right protected in the Constitution. Creating the notion that there is 'recreational fisheries' habitat as opposed to simply fish habitat (with the now-ended Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program) is an example of how priority rights have not been reflected in the past.

Marine Spatial Planning Technical Assessment Report

The Department has been taking steps to implement Indigenous Program Review recommendations since the phase one final report was released on May 22, 2018. An early example of this action is its response to the IPR recommendation to increase marine science capacity-building opportunities for Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management groups (AAROMs).

Specifically, the Department's Oceans Management Branch asked the Institute to engage AAROMs and Indigenous communities in discussions about their existing technical capacities and technical capacity needs to meaningfully participate in marine spatial planning. Based on these discussions, the Institute found that DFO is helping AAROMs and Indigenous governments and communities build their technical capacity to be involved in marine- and habitat-related activities by targeting Coastal Restoration Funds to these recipients. This is in fact highlighted as a best practice in the *Marine Spatial Planning Technical Capacity Assessment* report.²

We also learned that AAROMs, governments and communities are natural leaders in the protection of Canada's coasts and marine areas – and they share similar interests in how to continue advancing their technical skills to be involved in resource management activities.

Does this report involve the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program?

Officials are encouraged to read this report with a view to how the recommendations could easily apply to fish and fish habitat protection. For example, to help AAROMs and Indigenous communities build and retain technical capacity, officials could:

- ✓ Collaborate with the Department's Indigenous Program team and its co-delivery partners as they work to establish a long-term source of funding for training and to leverage training outcomes across programs
- ✓ Enable the sharing of professional development tools, such as technical job descriptions
- ✓ Continue to support AAROM and community outreach programs which align education and career progression paths for science, technical 'field' activities, and management
- ✓ Work with the Chief of Procurement to achieve economies of scale for standardized software, database storage solutions, sampling equipment, sensor technologies, drones, and other commonly required tools

The Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program may also want to consider assessing the technical capacity level of AAROMs and communities to be involved in fish and fish habitat protection and restoration activities to inform its Indigenous Habitat Partnerships Program. This exercise would also serve to establish a baseline on which to regularly measure capacity improvements and employment quality over the course of this program and other activities.

²² http://indigenousoceans.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/reports/MSP_Technical%20Assessment_June%202019.pdf