

Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management

DISCUSSION PAPER



**NATIONAL INDIGENOUS
FISHERIES INSTITUTE**

Indigenous Program Review

**INSTITUT NATIONAL DES
PÊCHES AUTOCHTONES**

Examen des programmes autochtones

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Program Overview

In 2002, a review of Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy found that some Indigenous groups were creatively pooling funding from the program with their own resources (and, in some cases, other funding sources) to collaborate in habitat, science, and oceans activities along an ecosystem or watershed.

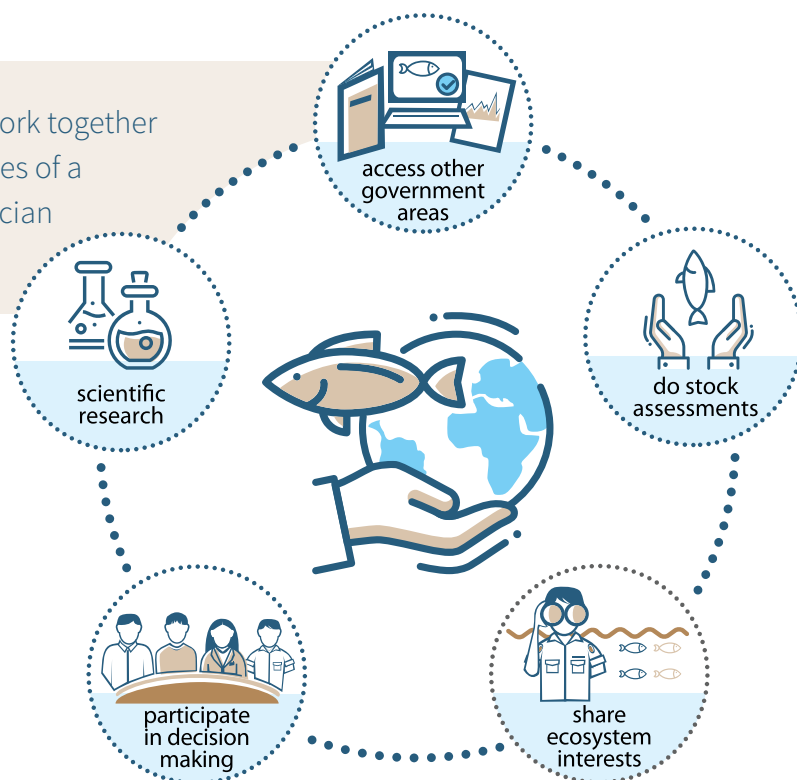
Indigenous groups recommended that the Department add this innovative approach to its programming. They also recommended that program changes be made to ensure Indigenous groups had greater participation in aquatic resource and oceans management processes and to better reflect Indigenous stock assessments and knowledge in the Department’s decisions.

The Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program was created to respond to these recommendations. Launched in 2004, the program helps Indigenous communities form a group along an ecosystem or watershed that is supported by skilled personnel, such as fisheries managers, biologists, and technologists. Technical professionals in these groups undertake scientific research activities to support ecosystem-based management. They also participate in advisory and decision-making processes related to aquatic resource and oceans management.

The Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program serves as a platform for Indigenous communities to access other sectors of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as other government agencies and partners beyond those related to fisheries management. It also encourages co operation at a broader, inter-community level.

There are presently 35 Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management groups, representing 258 Indigenous communities across Canada. Some communities belong to more than one group.

Communities work together to get the services of a scientist, technician or advisor.



Program Objectives

- 1.** Collaborative groups contributing to ecosystem management
- 2.** Administrative capacity and scientific/technical expertise participating in aquatic resource and oceans management
- 3.** Sound decision-making in advisory processes
- 4.** Strengthened relationships through improved information-sharing

Desktop Review Summary

In 2009, the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program underwent an evaluation and an audit. These activities were timely, as the Department wanted to renew the program to improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, and focus more on results.

The 2009 evaluation found that the program was an appropriate way to ensure Indigenous participation in fisheries and oceans matters as most aquatic resource and oceans management groups were focused on building core scientific, technical and administrative capacity to participate in decision-making processes. The program's two-staged approach to funding, which required groups to demonstrate capacity before moving from one level of funding to the next, was also working well. The evaluation found, however, that the delivery of the program needed some improvements, including:

- clearer roles and responsibilities of program administrators
- simplified approval process of proposed work plans
- formal service delivery standards
- more stringent performance measurement strategy

The evaluation, in fact, made two recommendations to improve program reporting: establish targets for performance measurement and create a way to get feedback from the groups on program success and service delivery.

While the 2009 audit did not find the program to be poorly managed or administered, it noted the lack of a guide outlining administrative and financial procedures, as well as guidance documents on the selection and review process for proposed work plans. It also found that activity reports required by aquatic resource and oceans management groups did not include a summary of results or other information required to assess the achievement of program objectives. In addition, the frequency and type of activity reports were found to cause unnecessary work for no extra value to the Department. Moreover, the audit found that successes were anecdotal, rather than linked to reporting.

To address these shortfalls, the audit recommended that Fisheries and Oceans Canada re-evaluate the frequency and type of activity reports required of recipients and establish procedures for officials to evaluate and report on performance (among other recommendations).

In 2011, the Department took some steps to address these issues. For example, they introduced public service standards for the review, approval and payment of work plan activities. They also brought in a more flexible approach to administration and reporting based on the capacity of each aquatic resource and oceans management group. However, a 2013 evaluation of the Aboriginal Strategies and Governance Program revealed that further steps still needed to be taken to improve proposal and reporting processes from the perspective of Indigenous program participants.

In 2011, the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program was also examined externally to assess the potential of its groups to adapt to longer-term activities. The report found that long-established groups were performing to a high standard, while more recently established groups had made solid progress. It also found that the Department had gained enormous goodwill by supporting the creation of aquatic resource and oceans management groups which had solid leadership and dedicated staff.

Indigenous interviewees in this study had high expectations of their groups; ultimately, seeing them assume greater jurisdictional responsibilities for all resources impacted within their geographic area. However, the report found that most federal officials were unaware of aquatic resource and oceans management groups – both in terms of their geographic coverage and their ability to deliver services beyond fisheries. These findings led to the conclusion that the groups were not being used to their full potential. The report also noted the structural limits of groups to expand because they were leveraging their core funding (up to the maximum) and 'hitting the wall' when it came to short-term project funding.

Based on these findings, the report recommended that:

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada should consider measures to support continued growth and institutional development of aquatic resource and oceans management groups, including how additional professional services could be centralized and accessed by multiple bodies.
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada and aquatic resource and oceans management groups should engage in joint marketing initiatives to raise awareness across the Department and other government entities about the ability of groups to deliver a range of services.

- The groups should find ways to work together to reduce costs and increase productivity.
- The groups should assess how to serve as the first point of contact for all natural resource technical information on behalf of their communities.

It does not appear that these recommendations were addressed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada or the aquatic resource and oceans management groups.

It is also unclear the extent to which these groups focus on, or are involved in, oceans management. The \$1.5 billion Oceans

Protection Plan is committed to Indigenous co-management, environmental protections, and science-based standards. Two of the plan's priority areas offer potential opportunities for aquatic resource and oceans management groups.

- restoring and protecting marine ecosystems and habitats using new tools and research
- strengthening partnerships and launching co-management practices with Indigenous communities, including building local emergency response capacity

Input of the Indigenous Program Review Panel

Indigenous executives with experience in fisheries and aquaculture programs agreed that aquatic resource and oceans management groups were not being used to their potential. In their experience, this was largely due to funding issues: either lack of funding or not receiving funds in a systematic or dependable way.

For example, some groups are forced to choose which services they can afford to deliver rather than completing their desired work plan. Other groups spend a great deal of time arranging alternative ways to fund their activities during the field season, while they wait for the actual funding to arrive.

These groups were initially based on an Indigenous idea and model but one may argue that they were created for administrative convenience.

Indigenous executives also questioned whether the groups had a real voice in decision-making processes. For example, they reported that First Nations were historically excluded from the process for establishing marine protection areas. They also did not think that Indigenous input to the review of the 2012 changes to the *Fisheries Act* reflected an equal partnership in decision-making (as opposed to a stakeholder).

Indigenous executives agreed with the 2009 evaluation and audit findings about performance measurement and reporting. They noted the urgent need for the Department to develop metrics similar to the commercial fisheries programs by engaging Indigenous groups and building performance indicators that measured benefits from the Indigenous perspective. They also recommended that the Department look at aquatic resource and oceans management groups which have independently taken steps to incorporate international standards into their work plans, including standards for science and to report on outcomes.

The need to balance and clarify the interconnectivity of the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management and the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy programs was another important point brought forward by these experts. They also emphasized the need for restructuring and proper funding to improve program delivery and outcomes for involved communities noting that, over time, groups had become more beholden to Fisheries and Oceans Canada than the communities they served.

The way advice and decision-making takes place does not make us feel valued. Who is looking out for the health of the species? It always comes back to 'what's the number for this year?'

Experiences of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Program Administrators

Staff at Fisheries and Oceans Canada who are involved in the day-to-day operations of the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program agreed that the lack of funding has limited the program to realize its full potential. They noted the benefits of leveraging funding from other sectors of the Department and other federal entities, but stressed the importance of internal coordination to reduce administrative and reporting duplications. They also explained that the work plans of aquatic resource and oceans management groups represented a negotiation between the priorities of communities and the priorities of the Department.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff supported improving performance indicators in order to measure more meaningful outcomes for Indigenous groups and communities. They suggested performance criteria could follow a group maturation or evolution path to ensure successes were recorded for both newly formed and well-established groups. They also stressed the importance of listening to the views of Indigenous groups and communities when proposing any changes to the program's funding options.

To improve the program overall, staff recommended that the criteria for eligibility be better defined with Indigenous groups and that a core model for aquatic resource and oceans management groups be identified and widely communicated. These changes were also considered necessary in preparation for new entrants to the program.

Points of Discussion

The Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program continued to build the relationship that Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Indigenous communities began through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program. Some aquatic resource and oceans management groups have also achieved credibility amongst their communities and partners.

However, the desktop review and the input of Indigenous experts and the Department's staff show that the program still has several important issues to address:

- Inadequate funds to use the program to its full potential
- Lack of standards for the types of activities and capacity-building the program will fund
- Lack of standards for the kinds of services that groups can deliver
- An inadequate oceans management component
- Limited basis to measure performance and outcomes; especially, to measure the impact of the groups in fisheries and oceans decision-making processes for the benefit of the communities they serve

The desktop review also shows that the potential of aquatic resource and oceans management groups to take on new service delivery activities, as was recommended in the 2011 external report, has not been fully tested by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

This discussion paper seeks to explore some solutions to these issues by asking for input on the following questions:

Defining Services and Structure

1. What services does your community currently receive from your aquatic resource and oceans management group? Are there other services that you would like to receive?
2. How is your aquatic resource and oceans management group organized? Do you see areas for general improvement?
3. Would your community benefit if aquatic resource and oceans management groups worked together more often (e.g., to share resources or professional services)? Do you see any problems with this approach?

Program Delivery

4. Would your community benefit from a centralized body of experts, working at arms-length from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, to give advice and training to enhance the services of your aquatic resource and oceans management group?

Addressing Program Component Overlaps

5. Are your science and monitoring activities done with the support of the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program or the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (or both)? Should science and monitoring activities be in both programs?

Improving Internal Awareness and Coordination

6. How do you interact with different teams at Fisheries and Oceans Canada? Is there a standard way to work collaboratively and to share information?
7. Has your aquatic resource and oceans management group ever worked with other levels of government or industry? If so, what types projects or services did you work on?

Improving how Performance is Measured and Reported

8. How are the professionals (e.g., biologists, fisheries managers, etc.) hired by your aquatic resource and oceans management group measured in terms of their skills and ability to improve Indigenous participation in decision-making processes?
9. How can we improve performance reporting on this program without creating complicated and unnecessary reporting requirements?
10. Does your aquatic resource and oceans management group prepare an annual report or other publications to regularly report on its work plan or activities? Does it reflect your priorities for fish and waterways in your community?

Indigenous Involvement in Decision-making

11. Is your community or aquatic resource and oceans management group participating in local and regional resource management processes? Is your data included and used effectively?

For New Entrants

12. Are you familiar with aquatic resource and oceans management groups?
13. Would your community be able to participate in one of these groups? If so, what is preventing your participation?
 - a. Have you ever talked to Fisheries and Oceans Canada or nearby communities to set up a group through the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management program?