The Mandate to Rebuild Healthy Fisheries

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Introduction

Canada is party to numerous global conventions, treaties and accords that mandate sustainable fisheries management, stock rebuilding, and science-based decision-making. These commitments underpin and reinforce the domestic implementation of the Fish Stocks provisions (FSP) of the modernized *Fisheries Act* and underscore the urgency of effective, science-based fisheries management.

Internationally, Canada is bound by a suite of global commitments—including the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Food and Agriculture Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, and its obligations through Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)—all of which emphasize precautionary, science-based, and ecosystem-based management of marine resources (**Table 1**). These commitments obligate Canada to restore overfished stocks and align closely with the FSP's objectives. Participation in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) further embeds these principles in transboundary and international fisheries governance. Together, these frameworks create a clear, coherent, and enforceable basis for Canada to meet its domestic and international obligations for sustainable fisheries management.

Domestically, Canada has translated its international commitments into the modernized *Fisheries Act* and a policy framework that guides departmental decision-making. While the FSP creates enforceable obligations for prescribed stocks, a broader suite of departmental policies—developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)—operationalize these obligations and extend precautionary, science-based management principles to the full range of federally managed fisheries (**Table 2**). Chief among these is the Sustainable Fisheries Framework (SFF), which brings together key policies such as the Precautionary Approach (PA) policy, rebuilding plan guidelines, and the Fisheries Monitoring Policy. Although these instruments do not have the force of law, they represent a standard of fisheries governance that Canadians can reasonably expect DFO to uphold. Canada's commitments are further reinforced through strategic plans and dedicated funding to support monitoring and regulatory expansion.

In this context, effective and accelerated implementation of Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the *Fisheries Act*—and full coverage of all federally managed stocks under Section 6.3—is critical to uphold Canada's domestic and global commitments. Regulatory listing is not an optional technical step, but a fundamental mechanism to deliver on Canada's legal responsibilities under international agreements. Without it, stocks remain outside the scope of the rebuilding provisions, leaving

Canada vulnerable to ecological decline, loss of credibility and public trust, and failure to meet its multilateral obligations.

Countries with clear and enforceable legal mandates to rebuild depleted fish stocks have seen significantly faster and more consistent recovery compared to those relying on discretionary or voluntary measures (Marchal et al., 2016). Studies show that time-bound rebuilding requirements lead to faster and more consistent stock recovery by eliminating vague timelines, enforcing science-based targets, and integrating socio-economic trade-offs within clear legal limits (Patrick and Cope, 2014). This evidence demonstrates the central importance of embedding rebuilding requirements in law and applying them universally to all relevant stocks.

Rebuilding fisheries is important for economic security, global trade and social trust

The mandate to rebuild depleted fish populations is not only a legal obligation under Canada's *Fisheries Act* but also a strategic imperative with wide-ranging societal, economic, and ecological benefits. Rebuilding supports food and economic security, particularly in coastal and Indigenous communities that depend on healthy fisheries for livelihoods and cultural practices. For example, a fully recovered northern cod fishery could create up to 16 times more jobs and grow to five times its current value (Sumaila and Teh, 2019). A rebuilt Atlantic mackerel fishery could generate a 12.9% return on investment (MacAskill, 2020), increasing community-based employment, revitalizing local economies and reducing dependence on income support programs.

Rebuilding fisheries strengthens Canada's global trade position by aligning with international sustainability standards and meeting the growing requirements for market access. Major seafood trading partners such as the European Union, the United States, and Japan have recently implemented stricter import controls to block products linked to overfishing or poor management. These measures include the EU's Catch Certification Scheme, the US Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) (NOAA, 2018), and Japan's Act on Ensuring the Proper Domestic Distribution and Importation of Specified Aquatic Animals and Plants (Government of Japan, 2022). These initiatives highlight the increasing importance of verifiable, science-based fisheries management, as outlined in the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes and the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency (The Coalition for Fisheries Transparency, 2024).

Against this backdrop, several Canadian fisheries (e.g., Northern cod) are advancing Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) [1] with international partners to achieve eco-certification, which

[1] There are currently two Fishery Improvement Plans (FIPs) for Northern cod initiated in 2016. One is led by FFAW for the handline, gillnet, and longline fleets, while another engages the offshore industry in Canada and abroad for longline, trawl, gillnet, and hook-and-line fisheries. Both aim to bring the stock to sustainable levels by December 2025. However, the "healthy zone" for Northern cod has not yet been defined, and management decisions continue to be made without established harvest control rules. According to critical thresholds and proposed upper stock reference points (60% of B0 or the average spawning stock biomass (SSB) from 1954–1970) based on periods of historically high productivity and ecosystem approaches, the current stock remains far below recovery benchmarks. Today, Northern cod biomass is roughly half of the previously determined limit reference point, projected to decline to its newly-defined limit, less than one-quarter of the unfished historical level, and about half of mid-20th century biomass. By any objective measure, the stock remains a fraction of what a truly rebuilt population would represent.

requires rebuilding to biologically healthy levels and explicit reference points with harvest control rules. However, market-access pressure may incentivize permissive thresholds and outweigh diverse perspectives by prioritizing yield maximization rather than broader socio-ecological objectives. While urgency is necessary, it is critical that market pressures do not compromise the quality of science-based management measures or the depth of consultation. Eco-certification will yield ecological and reputational gains only if these standards are preserved.

In addition, a rebuilding mandate can foster public trust in fisheries governance by ensuring that federal decisions are transparent, science-based, and legally accountable. In 2023, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada reported that DFO's ongoing failure to generate timely and dependable fisheries data compromises its capacity to manage stocks sustainably and transparently (OAG, 2023). On the global stage, the UN Secretary General has noted that transparency fosters accountability, improves results, holds institutions to standards and objectives, and helps incentivize collaboration and better impacts (United Nations, n.d.). Therefore, the timely implementation of rebuilding plans and monitoring targets is not only a matter of good governance but can play an essential role in restoring trust in DFO's decision-making and demonstrating that the *Fisheries Act* is being implemented with integrity. Embedding these expectations into law ensures that rebuilding is not left to discretion, but instead becomes a predictable, science-based process upon which the public, harvesters, and coastal communities can rely.

Finally, science and management processes to rebuild fisheries can play a vital role in strengthening relationships with Indigenous rightsholders and coastal communities. As brought forward in a number of submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans review of the *Fisheries Act*, rebuilding fisheries in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples is central to advancing reconciliation and achieving holistic sustainability (Kitasoo Xai'xais First Nation, 2024; Oceana Canada, 2024). Recognizing Indigenous Knowledge, governance, and priorities in the design and implementation of rebuilding plans is not only a legal obligation under the *United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights Act* (UNDRIP)[2] and constitutional law—it is also key to achieving more robust, just, and ecologically sound outcomes for Canada's oceans.

Rebuilding is fiscally responsible

From a fiscal perspective, rebuilding fisheries may lead to more efficient and cost-effective government spending. Proactive stock rebuilding reduces the need for expensive emergency interventions and stabilizes ecosystems to support long-term yields. In Canada, the financial fallout from the Northern cod collapse in the 1990s, including income support, retraining, and economic restructuring, far exceeded what any proactive rebuilding strategy could have cost. Implementing the FSP effectively can therefore reduce financial volatility and free up public resources for forward-looking investments in monitoring, science, and habitat protection.

The current status quo approach of listing stocks — at the current pace, this would entail five slow-moving batches through to 2034 — does not align with the Department's own financial resourcing

[2] See Action items 37, 38, 40 to be led by DFO in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan available: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/pdf/unda-action-plan-digital-eng.pdf

(**Figure 1**), which indicates that the high upfront costs of regulation are now complete, and the remaining work of listing and implementing rebuilding plans should be significantly more cost-effective and accelerated. According to the Department's Audit of the Implementation of the *Fisheries Act*, from 2019–2024, the federal government has invested $107.4 million (with an additional $17.6 million in ongoing funding) to support DFO's implementation of the PA policy and the development of rebuilding plans for 181 major fish stocks under the modernized *Fisheries Act* (Government of Canada, 2022a). By 2022, DFO had spent approximately $72 million developing the regulatory framework needed to implement the FSP. However, no rebuilding plans were delivered until three years later, after an additional $53 million had been allocated and a second list of stocks was developed. Looking ahead, DFO has a renewed investment of $33.5 million from 2025 to 2030 to expand the number of prescribed stocks beyond the current 30 and continue delivering on its legal obligations under Sections 6.1 to 6.3 of the *Fisheries Act* (Government of Canada, 2025). These sustained financial commitments underscore that the department is well-resourced to fulfill its mandate to rebuild depleted fisheries and advance sustainable management. Fast-tracking the listing process would not only align with the Department's allocated funding but also allow the fishing industry and coastal communities to realize the economic and ecological benefits of rebuilding much sooner.

Each year of delay in listing and rebuilding defers stock recovery and hundreds of millions in long-term value, undermines returns on public investment, prolongs economic and ecological losses, and inflates future recovery costs as degradation and missed harvests compound. Take, for example, the Southwest Nova Scotia/Bay of Fundy herring stock, once the foundation of one of Canada's largest fisheries and still a key forage species in the region. Fishing pressure on this stock remains out of compliance with established harvest control rules and was not prioritized in Batch 1; it is currently only under consideration for inclusion in Batch 2 (Government of Canada, 2022b). If it had been listed in 2022 under Batch 1 and rebuilding had commenced according to harvest rules, the stock could have delivered a net present value of at least $402 million by 2032 (Oceans North, 2024). Instead, the stock was proposed in Batch 2 in 2024, and the delay until the likely listing in 2025 pushes potential benefits off to 2035. By accelerating investments and acting early, Canada can unlock hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits, reduce long-term management costs, and uphold sustainability commitments.

More progress is needed under the Fisheries Act to close the legal gaps and policy implementation

Progress in implementing the changes to the Act has been slow, and key gaps have emerged that can be fixed with simple amendments. Additionally, some DFO fisheries management policies need to be updated to better implement the intention of the Act. These changes will help ensure the FSP are successful in reversing the long-term decline of fish stocks in Canada and returning them to abundance.

The 2019 amendments to the *Fisheries Act* introduced long-awaited legal tools to create rebuilding plans for depleted stocks and promote sustainable fisheries management in Canada. Yet, six years later, implementation of the FSP remains slow, uneven, and incomplete. These delays threaten to undermine both the spirit and substance of the law. Three core implementation gaps continue to

hinder meaningful progress: (1) the failure of Section 6.1 to define "sustainability" in measurable terms; (2) the slow pace of listing of eligible stocks under Section 6.3; and (3) the inconsistent application of the PA policy, particularly for unlisted stocks. Each of these gaps poses significant risks to Canada's ability to meet its legal, ecological, and economic obligations under the Act.

1. Legal weakness: Section 6.1 lacks a clear definition of sustainability

> ***6.1 (1)*** *In the management of fisheries, the Minister shall implement measures to maintain major fish stocks at or above the level necessary to promote the sustainability of the stock, taking into account the biology of the fish and the environmental conditions affecting the stock*

Section 6.1 requires the Minister to implement measures that maintain major fish stocks at levels necessary to promote sustainability. However, the law fails to define what "sustainability" entails in scientific or operational terms. In the absence of legally codified benchmarks, such as a mandatory Upper Stock Reference Point (USR) or Target Reference Point (TRP), this has led to an overly narrow interpretation of sustainability as merely avoiding serious harm rather than restoring stocks to healthy levels.

The case of Northern cod (2J3KL) illustrates this legal gap. Although the stock is listed in the FSP, recent management decisions contradict DFO's own science-based guidance (DFO, 2022). In 2024, DFO approved a commercial quota of 18,000 tonnes, despite scientific projections that this level carried a 49% chance of returning the stock to the critical zone by 2027. In 2025, the department approved a quota of 38,000 tonnes, even though this represented a 71% probability of stock decline and a 27% chance of falling into the critical zone by 2028. These decisions violate FSP implementation guidelines, which call for a high likelihood (≥75%) of avoiding decline below the Limit Reference Point (LRP), and a minimum 50% probability of rebuilding toward the USR or TRP (DFO, 2022).

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans failed to provide transparent rationale for overriding conservation concerns under Subsection 6.1(1) in favour of presumed cultural or socio-economic benefits,[3] as required under Subsection 6.1(2), which stipulates that such decisions can be supported by consultation outcomes or socio-economic analysis. In addition to scientific concerns, this approach also frustrates the law. Without codified requirements to rebuild to a healthy zone, this leaves room for political discretion to override precautionary principles and the department's own guidance.

To reinforce the intent of Section 6.1, "sustainability" should be clearly defined as maintaining or rebuilding stocks in the healthy zone—above the USR with very high probability— in alignment

[3] In 2024, DFO staff were questioned at the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans on the study, "The Impact of the Reopening of the Cod Fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec". DFO staff state the Minister's decision was based solely on "year-round" employment. In reference to potential economic benefits, DFO staff state "we don't have specific, hard data per se. We have general ideas..." Available: https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/FOPO/meeting-120/evidence

with the PA policy and be inclusive of other aspects of holistic sustainability that reflect stakeholder and rightsholders values and international best practices. Alternatively, DFO should enact regulations under Section 6.1 in the *Fisheries Act* to ensure consistent interpretation of "sustainability" modeled after those for rebuilding under Section 6.2 and informed by the FSP implementation guidelines (DFO, 2022) and recommendations inclusive of IKS (Frid et al, 2023; Moffat et al., 2024) and ecosystem approaches. Given the healthy zone is defined through management processes, this must include collaboration with Indigenous Peoples on setting objectives, benchmarks and harvest rules to uphold the department's reconciliation responsibilities under the UNDRIP.

2. Regulatory delay: Failure to list all federally managed stocks under Section 6.3

> ***6.3*** *The major fish stocks referred to in sections 6.1 and 6.2 are to be prescribed by regulations.*

Under Section 6.3, the legal obligations of the FSP apply only to stocks formally listed in regulation. While the listing mechanism was intended to enable orderly implementation, it has instead created procedural bottlenecks and unacceptable delays. As of mid-2025, only approximately 12.3% (24 of 194 stocks) of all Fishery Audit index stocks have been formally listed under the FSP.[4] This leaves a majority of Canada's key fish stocks—including economically and ecologically important stocks such as redfish, snow crab, and various Pacific salmon populations—outside the law's protection.

Unlisted stocks generally do not benefit from mandatory rebuilding plans, required reference points, or defined timelines for recovery. This has created a two-tiered system in which listed stocks benefit from science-based oversight, while unlisted stocks remain subject to political discretion, despite the existence of the PA policy since 2009. For instance, redfish in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, amidst projected decline and recruitment concerns, has seen significant quota increases without legal accountability to minimize risk of decline. Similarly, capelin in Northeast Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be fished at high levels, despite projections of further decline and its critical role in rebuilding Northern cod.

Delays in prescribing depleted fish stocks under Section 6.3 of the *Fisheries Act* may be legally vulnerable and contrary to the law's protective purpose. A Federal Court case under the *Species at Risk Act* held that once a Minister forms the view that a species is at risk, delaying action frustrates the purpose of the statute.[5] Similarly, under the *Fisheries Act*, delays in listing stocks, especially those in the Critical zone or declining within the Cautious zone, could undermine conservation objectives. As argued in some cases, the government cannot frustrate the law by refusing to

[4] Note that the Fishery Audit index stock list includes 19 stocks that are managed through RFMOs (e.g. ICCAT, NAFO, ICCAT), some of which include explicit commitments to fisheries sustainability, similar objectives and binding commitments to rebuild stocks and implement precautionary frameworks (Table 1).
[5] *Western Canada Wilderness Committee v Canada (Environment and Climate Change)*, 2024 FC 870 at paras 51-69.

regulate.[6] Prompt prescription would align with the Act's conservation and rebuilding objectives. Ongoing inaction in listing clearly eligible stocks could be challenged on administrative fairness and procedural grounds.

To close this gap, Section 6.3 should be amended to require that all federally managed fish stocks be listed under the FSP by December 31, 2026 (see ambitious scenario in Figure 1). This would ensure legal clarity, extend essential protections to vulnerable stocks, and fulfill Parliament's intent under the *Fisheries Act*.

Consultation and public support

Consultations on the Batch 2 under the FSP revealed no opposition and strong support for advancing implementation (Government of Canada, 2024). Stakeholders emphasized the need to prioritize the listing of forage fish, improve transparency, integrate climate risk, and include Indigenous rights and knowledge into fisheries governance.

During the consultation period, First Nations, including Sipekne'katik First Nation, Ditidaht First Nation and Council of Yukon First Nations called for clearer timelines, the inclusion of culturally significant species (e.g., snow crab and Pacific salmon), and stronger legal mechanisms to support co-governance and rights-based fisheries management. Fulfilling these priorities requires not only listing more stocks but also meaningful collaboration in rebuilding processes, including setting LRPs and implementing ecosystem approaches. It demands structural shifts in governance, with Indigenous Peoples as collaborative decision-makers in the rebuilding and management of fish stocks (Swerdfager et al., under review).

3. Policy weakness: Inconsistent application of the Precautionary Approach

Beyond legal and regulatory shortcomings, the inconsistent application of the PA policy across listed and unlisted stocks undermines effective fisheries management. FSP-listed stocks benefit from binding legal requirements—such as LRPs and rebuilding plans—while unlisted stocks remain governed by discretionary decisions that may ignore precautionary principles.

In 2025:

- **100% of FSP-listed stocks** (24 of 24) had LRPs in place.
- **100% of critical, listed stocks** (11 of 11) had rebuilding plans.
- **83.3% of listed stocks** (20 of 24) had USRs.

  By contrast:
- Only **63.5% of unlisted stocks** (108 of 170) had LRPs.
- Just **0.05% of critical, unlisted stocks** (1 of 21) had a rebuilding plan.

[6] Relying on Supreme Court precedent, the Federal Court of Appeal has recognized that "a regulatory authority cannot nullify the application of a law and deprive the litigants of a benefit or remedy to which they would be entitled by refraining from adopting the regulation which conditions its existence. As argued in *Groupe Maison Candiac Inc v Canada (Attorney General)*, 2020 FCA 88 at para 74, leave to appeal to SCC refused 2020 CanLII 97859; *Irving Oil Ltd et al v Provincial Secretary of New Brunswick*, [1980] 1 SCR 787 at 794-95.

- Only **54.7% of unlisted stocks** (93 of 170) had USRs.

Even within the listed group, some stocks under Section 6.1 fail to meet the implementation guidelines due to missing USRs or harvest control rules (HCRs). Recent quota decisions for both redfish (unlisted) and Northern cod (FSP-listed) in 2024 and 2025 illustrate the problem. Despite explicit scientific warnings, catch limits were increased, increasing the likelihood of further decline. These actions violate the core principles of the PA policy and erode public trust in Canada's fisheries governance.

Regardless of whether stocks are listed, DFO must apply the PA policy consistently for all federally managed fisheries. This includes establishing provisional LRPs and USRs, interim biomass targets well into the healthy zone, adopting catch decisions that minimize risk.

Conclusion

Failure to fully implement the *Fisheries Act* FSP has serious ecological, economic, and legal consequences—undermining recovery, delaying benefits to coastal communities, and exposing the federal government to potential legal challenges for inaction. Canada has the science, policy frameworks, and legislative foundation needed to rebuild fish stocks and deliver lasting benefits. What remains is the political will and regulatory precision to implement the FSP with urgency. Accelerating this work is not only a legal necessity—it is an economic and ecological opportunity Canada cannot afford to miss.

We recommend the following to deliver on Canada's mandate for healthy fisheries:

1. **Target abundance:** Amend Section 6.1 through legislative or regulatory change to require stocks be managed in the *Healthy Zone*, not merely above LRP. This aligns with global best practices and eliminates ambiguity around precautionary targets;
2. **Expand FSP coverage with a firm deadline:** Amend Section 6.3 through legislative change or regulations to list all federally managed stocks under the FSP by **December 31, 2026**. This deadline will create legal clarity and drive departmental and stakeholder collaboration; and
3. **Require annual accountability:** Mandate an annual report to Parliament on the status of all federally managed fish stocks, rebuilding progress, and management actions taken. Transparency is essential for public trust and adaptive management.

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Table 1. Key international conventions, treaties and accords signed by Canada related to sustainable fisheries management, stock rebuilding, and science-based decision-making, date of Canadian ratification or signature, number of global signatories, and sources for further reference.

Commitment	Content	Relation to *Fisheries Act* Fish Stocks Provisions	Date Signed by Canada	# of Signatories	Link
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	By signing the 2030 Agenda, countries committed to achieving 17 SDGs and 169 targets, including SDG 14: Life Below Water, which includes: • Target 14.4 – "By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics."	The modernization of the *Fisheries Act* in 2019 with the addition of the FSP is Canada's primary legal mechanism for achieving SDG 14.4.	2015	193	https://sdgs.un.org/
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)' s Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	By 2030, take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity and by ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, while providing the necessary means of implementation. Includes: • Target 5: Ensure Sustainable, Safe and Legal Harvesting and Trade of Wild Species;	As stated in Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy, the FSP "strengthen the federal government's ability to achieve Targets 5, 9, and 10". The inclusion of more stocks FSP and implementing rebuilding plans is crucial for meeting GBF targets by 2030, such as halting species extinction, ensuring sustainable harvesting, managing wild species to benefit people and enhancing biodiversity.	CBD: 1992 GBF: 2022	196 parties	https://www.cbd.int/gbf https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/biodiversity/2030-nature-strategy.html

	• Target 9: Manage Wild Species Sustainably To Benefit People. • Target 10: Enhance Biodiversity and Sustainability in Agriculture, Aquaculture, Fisheries, and Forestry				
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries	When a stock is depleted, management measures should provide for sustained recovery (Art. 7.6.10), implement the precautionary approach using target and limit reference points (Art. 7.5).	Echoed in Sections 6.1 and 6.2: Calls for MSY-based rebuilding and rapid action when stocks decline.	1995	170+ countries (voluntary)	https://www.fao.org/fisheries/code/en
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)	Requires states to manage marine resources to MSY levels and prevent overexploitation on the high seas.	Legal foundation supporting FSP mandates under Sections 6.1-6.2.	1982	170 parties	https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf
United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA)	Commits the parties to applying the precautionary approach to fisheries management (Article 6.1, 6.2), the science-based development of limit reference points for harvest levels (6.3) and taking measures to ensure such reference points are not exceeded (6.4)	Supports Sections 6.1 and 6.2: Mandates precautionary MSY-based management.	1995	93 parties	https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_fish_stocks.htm
World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies	No subsidies to fishing of overfished stocks unless measures are in place to rebuild them (Art. 4.1, 4.3).	Requires implementation of Sections 6.2 and 6.3 to demonstrate Canada has rebuilding plans for overfished stocks.	1995, new rules 2022	166 members	https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_e.htm
Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)	Canada contributes to NAFO, ICCAT, IATTC, and others to promote science-based quotas and stock rebuilding. Each of these accords establish mechanisms for the management of fish stocks which are shared with other countries, and all generate decisions or each including explicit commitments to fisheries sustainability.	Promotes FSP-aligned science-based and ecosystem-based fisheries governance.	Multiple dates	Multiple RFMOs (Canada is member)	https://www.nafo.int/ https://www.iattc.org/ https://www.iccat.int/en/

Table 2. National and Departmental legal and policy instruments to fulfill its international obligations and ensure sustainable fisheries, including content summary, date, relevance to the FSP, and links for further reference.

Instrument	Content	Date	Key role	Link
Precautionary Approach (PA) Policy	Requires fisheries to be managed in a precautionary manner, including identification of reference points, stock status and harvest control rules.	2009	Underpins Section 6.1 by requiring limit and upper stock reference points for prescribed stocks. Underpins Section 6.2 by requiring rebuilding plans for stocks in the critical zone and promoting development while the stock is cautious and declining.	https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/reports-rapports/regs/sff-cpd/precaution-eng.htm
Modernized *Fisheries Act*	Section 6.1 and 6.2 mandate sustainable management and rebuilding of prescribed fish stocks.	2019	Primary legal basis for the FSP; requires sustainable levels and rebuilding plans.	https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-14/
DFO Sustainable Fisheries Framework	Guidance issued for operationalizing FSP using PA policy and science-based thresholds.	2022	Provides operational guidance for implementing Sections 6.1 and 6.2.	https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/reports-rapports/regs/sff-cpd/guidelines-lignes-directrices-eng.htm
Regulations Amending the Fishery (General) Regulations	DFO prescribes initial 30 fish stocks to the FSP and establishes rebuilding plan requirements.	2022	First time-bound step in implementing the FSP and details rebuilding plan requirements.	https://www.canadagazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2022/2022-04-13/html/sor-dors73-eng.html
DFO Work Plan for FSP Batch 2	DFO work plans for 2023-2025 indicate intent to prescribe a second, larger batch of stocks, initially aimed for early 2024.	2023-2025	Supports operationalization of Sections 6.1-6.3 and enhances legal coverage across Canada's managed fisheries.	https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/DP-PM/2025-26/index-eng.html#B2.1
DFO Fishery Monitoring Policy Funding	Allocated $30.9 million over 5 years to increase monitoring for 23 priority stocks.	2024	Supports science-based decision-making critical to Sections 6.1 and 6.2.	https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att_e_44377.html

DFO FSP Implementation Budget and Work Plan	Allocated $33.5 million over 5 years to continue to implement the FSP and will add a new, larger batch of fish stocks to the current list of 30 under the provisions.	2025-2026	Reinforces departmental accountability and capacity for fulfilling FSP legal obligations.	https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/dp-pm/2025-26/index-eng.html

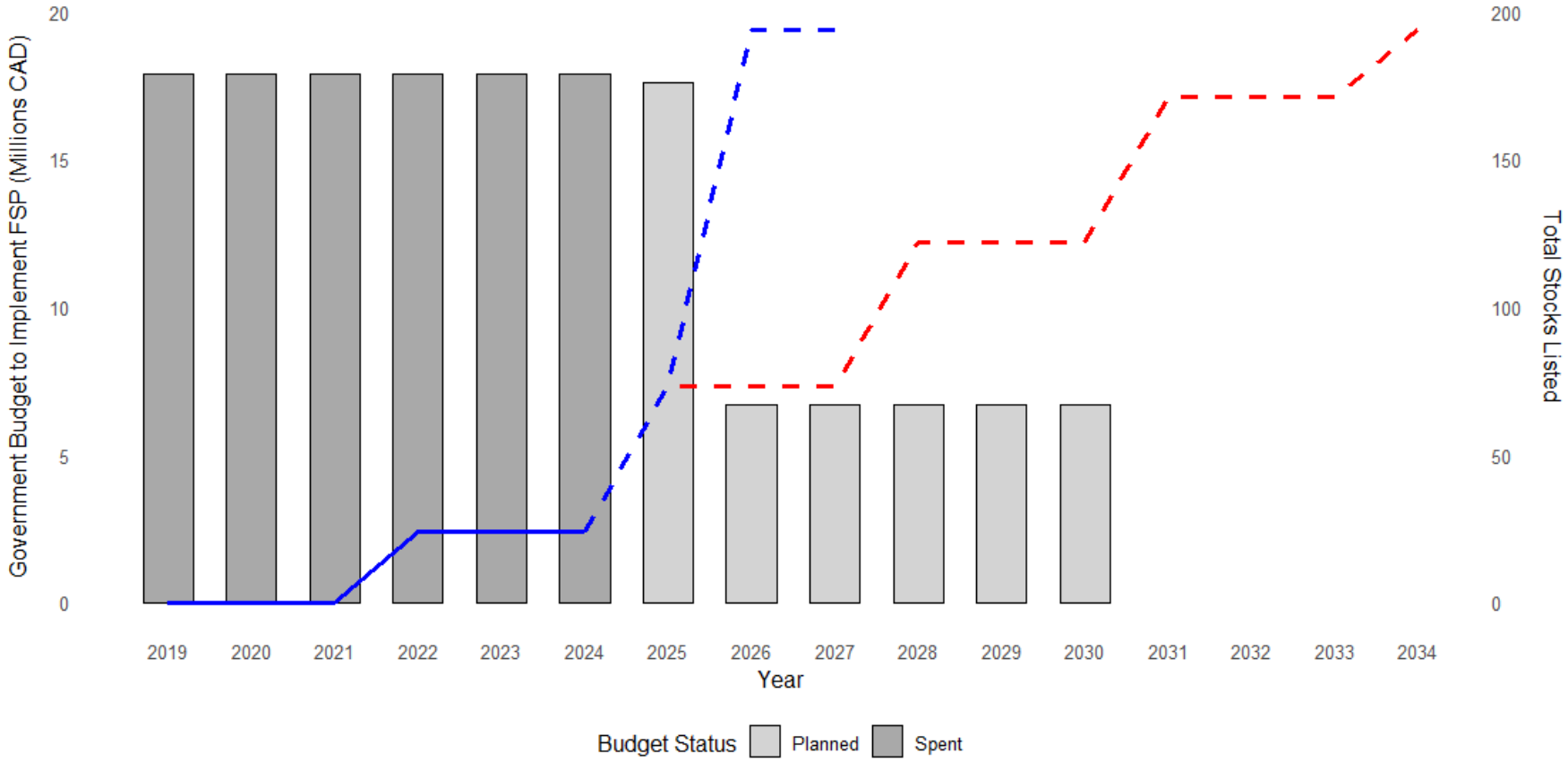

Figure 1. The government budget to implement the Fish Stocks provisions, as described in departmental audits and plans, overlayed with the number of total Fishery Audit index stocks (n=194) listed in the Fish Stocks provisions over time, under an ambitious action scenario (dashed blue line), compared to the baseline number of total stocks listed under the status quo (dashed red line). Status quo assumes that upcoming batch size and timelines are consistent with previously implemented batches (solid blue). The ambitious scenario assumes 62 stocks are listed in 2025 and all remaining stocks are listed in 2026.