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Submission to the Consultation Process on: *Getting Major Projects Built in Canada - Discussion Paper on Proposed Legislative, Regulatory, and Policy Reforms*

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Oceana Canada acknowledges the Government of Canada's efforts to improve federal decision-making processes and create a system that is more efficient, predictable, transparent, and timely.

We support the government's stated commitment to include and align Indigenous perspectives and priorities in the development of legislative, regulatory, and policy reforms. We also support the continued implementation of Canada's commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

As Canada seeks to grow its economy and streamline decision-making for major projects, those same principles of efficiency, predictability, and transparency should also guide decisions related to conservation, sustainable fisheries management, and consultations with Indigenous Peoples. Consistent and transparent processes are essential to public trust, confidence in federal institutions, and investor certainty.

In developing legislative reforms, the government should also take the opportunity to address persistent gaps and weaknesses in fisheries management that have contributed to the depletion and underperformance of fish stocks across Canada. Reforms should prioritize clearer and more reliable decision-making under the *Fisheries Act*. Strengthening key provisions would improve implementation, support effective fisheries management outcomes, and reinforce public confidence.

In that spirit, we respectfully recommend the following improvements to the *Fisheries Act*:

1. End overfishing by requiring stocks to be managed to the healthy zone.

As proposed in Oceana Canada's submission [1] to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans five-year review of the *Fisheries Act*, subsection

[1] https://oceana.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2024/12/Oceana_Canada_Fisheries_Act_Review_Submission.pdf

6.1(1) should be amended to require the Minister to maintain all major fish stocks at or above the healthy zone, instead of the vague "at or above the level necessary to promote the sustainability of the stock." This would provide clear direction to manage for abundance and give managers, harvesters and investors a transparent and stable basis for decision-making.

2. **Apply the Fish Stocks provisions to all federally managed major fish stocks through a clear implementation timeline.**

Subsection 6.3 of the Act should be amended to set a date by which all major fish stocks must be prescribed in regulation. (Since the Act was amended in 2019, only 87 fish stocks have been prescribed out of nearly 200 federally managed fish stocks.) This will ensure that the Fish Stocks provisions are applied consistently and transparently across all federally managed fisheries, strengthening confidence in fisheries management.

3. **Require annual public reporting to Parliament on the status of fish stocks.**

A provision should be added to the *Fisheries Act* to require the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to produce an annual report to Parliament on the status and trends of all federally managed fish stocks. Regular public reporting would strengthen accountability and demonstrate whether management decisions are delivering measurable results.

4. **Require collaborative management with Indigenous Peoples and the pairing of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Western science.**

Canada's fisheries future depends on durable partnerships with Indigenous rightsholders and governance systems grounded in trust and legitimacy. Strengthening collaborative decision-making within the *Fisheries Act* would support implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*) and its Action Plan, while contributing to more credible and effective fisheries management decisions.

We recommend the following:

- Section 2.5 should be amended to require that fisheries management decisions affecting Indigenous rightsholders are inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
- Section 7: Require the Minister to enter into fisheries co-governance arrangements with rightsholders with respect to their traditional territory and authorize the Minister to share decision making authority with rightsholders in co-governance arrangements.

The government has an opportunity to modernize the *Fisheries Act* to provide more efficient, effective, and transparent decisions that support sustained economic growth in Canada's coastal communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on these reforms.

Sincerely,

Josh Laughren
Executive Director

Oceana Canada was established as an independent charity in 2015 and is part of the largest international advocacy group dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana Canada has successfully campaigned to ban single-use plastics, end the shark fin trade, make rebuilding depleted fish populations the law, improve the way fisheries are managed and protect marine habitat. We work with civil society, academics, fishers, Indigenous Peoples and governments to return Canada's formerly vibrant oceans to health and abundance. By restoring Canada's oceans, we can strengthen our communities, reap greater economic and nutritional benefits, and protect our future.