

June 14, 2022

OCEANA CANADA'S PRESENTATION TO THE FOPO COMMITTEE STUDY: SCIENCE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS



**Oceana Canada's presentation to the FOPO committee study:
Science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans
June 14, 2022**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important work of the FOPO Committee.

My name is Dr. Robert Rangeley, Oceana Canada's Director of Science.

I would like to focus on three recommendations within the scope of this study, all related to Oceana's mission to restore our oceans to abundance to help feed the world. We believe these recommendations get to the heart of what science information is prioritized, how effectively it is used in decision-making, and how DFO shares the basis of those decisions with the public. Oceana Canada believes that DFO must:

1. Prioritize and resource the increase in capacity necessary to complete fisheries rebuilding plans;
2. Adequately monitor our fisheries; and
3. Increase public accountability in decision-making.

First, Canada's new rebuilding regulations should mark a major turning point for our fisheries that ensure critically depleted fish populations get the necessary plans for a long-overdue effort on rebuilding. Of course, success depends on how well the regulations are implemented – and that requires collecting and making decisions based on good science.

DFO now has 24 months to create plans for the 16 critical stocks in the Batch One list of the new Regulations. And soon, the Minister must batch-in all remaining stocks. This is good news. What is not at all clear is how the requirements will be met, given DFO's track record.

Oceana Canada's annual Fishery Audit found that only 7 of 33 critically depleted stocks, that's 21%, have rebuilding plans and most are poor quality. DFO achieves only 20% of their deliverables laid out in annual workplans but had they met their priorities they would have doubled the number of completed rebuilding plans.

Because of a lack of science resources, the task may be larger than DFO is acknowledging. A new analysis that includes data-poor stocks suggests the total number in the critical zone may be 58, or 25% of all our stocks, not counting salmon.

Second, DFO needs to address inconsistencies in catch monitoring by fully implementing the Fishery Monitoring Policy introduced in 2019 which sets national standards for objectives and methods. One of the reasons our stocks continue to be overfished or fail to recover is that DFO consistently undercounts how many fish are taken – including all sources of fishing from commercial and recreational to bait and bycatch.

There are no fishing mortality estimates for 80 per cent of our stocks and for the remainder, we don't have the full picture. To give fish populations a chance to recover, DFO must count everything caught in a fishery and account for all sources of fishing mortality in decision-making.

Third, DFO must publicly communicate the scientific findings on which management is based, in advance of fisheries decisions.

The Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) has a policy intended to ensure transparency and timely dissemination of publications. Unfortunately, less than 10% of science publications are released on time. To make matters worse, the most relevant science advice was often not publicly available until after the decision was made and communicated.

As a result, and despite the Government's intention to promote public transparency and policy engagement, decision-making in DFO may be based, too frequently, on a flawed or limited understanding of the underlying scientific evidence.

To recap: Oceana Canada recommends that DFO prioritizes and increases their capacity to develop science-based rebuilding plans for all critically depleted stocks, to invest in and implement the Fisheries Monitoring policy so we count everything we catch, and to publicly communicate the scientific basis on which fisheries management decisions are made.

The health of one of Canada's most important industries, and the future of our coastal communities, depends on how, and how well, scientific information is collected, used and communicated.

To demonstrate they are meeting these and other responsibilities, we recommend that DFO publishes an annual report on the status of stocks, staffing levels and expenditures by program area, and fisheries management performance in a publicly available "Report to Parliament".

While I have narrowly focused my comments, there is broader engagement and sources of evidence, including by indigenous communities, that must ultimately inform fisheries decision-making, in an ecosystem context, while urgently addressing the growing threats of climate change.

Thank you.

Robert Rangeley, Ph.D. | Science Director | Oceana Canada



1701 Hollis St, Suite 800
Halifax, NS Canada B3J 3M8
M +1.902.401.2961
E rrangeley@oceana.ca | W oceana.ca