



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

Developing a Framework for Aquatic Species at Risk Conservation: A multi- species approach

WHAT-WE-HEARD REPORT

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Fisheries and Oceans
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INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the summer of 2023, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) embarked on [WAVE 3](#) engagement as part of the process of developing a [Framework for Aquatic Species at Risk Conservation](#). The new framework aims to improve conservation outcomes for aquatic species at risk using a multiple-species approach in line with the [Species at Risk Act](#).

A multiple-species approach is a proactive measure that can be used to address the challenges related to multiple species simultaneously. A multiple-species approach can:

1. Encourage collaboration to support actions that foster conservation among communities or stakeholders and
2. Focus on conservation measures for multiple species in the same place, e.g., a watershed or multiple species that are affected by the same threat, e.g., a noise disturbance.

After initial engagement phases with Indigenous and non-Indigenous subject-matter experts and a wider public audience, the DFO drafted **five** guiding principles as follows:

Principle 1: Implement multi-species approaches to improve conservation outcomes

Principle 2: Respect Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, incorporate Indigenous perspectives and enhance opportunities for Indigenous leadership.

Principle 3: Form strong partnerships in conservation.

Principle 4: Strengthened Knowledge Base for Decision Making

Principle 5: Adaptive management

Before the framework is finalized and to ensure that the ideals of the diverse population of Indigenous women across Canada are taken up in the principles, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) in collaboration with the DFO hosted a virtual roundtable session with Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) Peoples on September 7, 2023. Twenty-three (23) people participated in the discussion.

Methods

The roundtable discussion was hosted on Zoom and was led by a panel including a Facilitator, a Knowledge Keeper, the Senior Director for Environmental Policy at NWAC, and three representatives from the DFO. The roundtable discussion began with an opening prayer followed by an overview of the five guiding principles including the best practices related to each principle. After this introductory session, the Facilitator engaged the participants in an open discussion. Where necessary, the Facilitator included in the discussion one or more guiding questions. Using a PowerPoint presentation, each principle and the related best practices were presented to the participants in turn. Participants were then allowed to share their perspectives on each principle and related best practices.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report represents the output from a roundtable discussion on the **Framework for Species at Risk Conservation**. It includes an outline of each of the five guiding principles related to the framework, best practices for each principle, questions related to each principle and associated best practices and the responses of participants to each of the five guiding principles and associated best practices. The information shared by participants in the roundtable discussion would help to inform the DFO's new proposed changes identified under the relevant provisions of the [Species at Risk Act](#), SARA of Canada.

Overall, the participants were supportive of the five new guiding principles, saying that the DFO appears to be on the right track with the development of this new framework. However, whereas the five principles are seen as a good starting point – beyond the development of this framework, participants believe government and industry must do more to include Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) Peoples as equals in both the decision-making process and the implementation of conservation efforts. As a result, the key themes in the feedback from participants revolve around the inclusion of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) Peoples and their knowledge in conservation efforts.

Acknowledging Indigenous Peoples as leaders in conservation efforts, not only participants.

As traditional caretakers of the land, Indigenous People have the depth and breadth of knowledge to not only inform but also lead conservation efforts. However, participants feel that Indigenous knowledge is not fully respected and that greater emphasis is placed on Western science. Many participants expressed a desire to see traditional Indigenous knowledge being utilized alongside science-based information because conserving at-risk species is complex, and the interconnectedness of ecosystems cannot be ignored. Some participants referenced international best practices, citing Australia as an example of Indigenous People acting as land stewards, leading initiatives to reclaim land. As suggested by participants, part of these efforts might involve educating non-Indigenous people about the role of Indigenous People and defending the role they play.

Creating community-based opportunities for Indigenous leadership.

While participants view the new framework as an improvement to historic efforts to invite Indigenous women into conservation activities, participants believe more engagement needs to happen directly in their communities – especially ones that are specifically impacted by declining populations of at-risk species. Participants expressed a desire for the DFO to be present in their communities, offering forums, training, and incentives to encourage and create opportunities for Indigenous stewardship. They view this capacity-building as an opportunity to not only inform and engage community members but also form the relationships necessary for strong and long-lasting partnerships.

Including a variety of Indigenous voices in engagement.

When considering Indigenous engagement, participants mentioned the need to involve a variety of Indigenous women from different communities. They emphasize the diversity among Indigenous communities, noting that the goals of the individual Indigenous Nations may not always align. Therefore, it is essential to have conversations with many representatives within one community, and with several different communities whose views may vary.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Principle 1: Implement multi-species approaches to improve conservation outcomes.

Multi-species approaches should be used to maximize the ability to recover and protect species at risk, improving overall conservation outcomes.

Best practices include:

1. Maximizing benefits for aquatic species at risk through multi-species approaches, where feasible and where there is no compelling reason not to.
2. Grouping multiple species for consideration in multi-species approaches based on the best available information, including feasibility and biological characteristics of the species.
3. Clearly identify the reasons for grouping species so that adjustments can be made to these groupings as needed in the future. Remaining flexible to splitting groups of species if more information becomes available to support this splitting, or if splitting is more appropriate at other stages of SARA delivery.
4. In place-based approaches, considering overlaps in critical habitat amongst various species. In threat-based approaches, considering primary threats to species.
5. To the extent possible, analyze species data (e.g., threat, and place data) at the same unit of resolution (watersheds, counties, standardized grids).
6. Where species are grouped, including a description of shared methods and analysis, and clearly including species-specific information where necessary.
7. Selecting performance indicators that can evaluate the effectiveness of multi-species approaches.
8. Tracking and reporting on the use of multi-species approaches to support delivery of SARA activities.

Questions

1. *What other characteristics can be used to group multiple species?*
2. *Should the best practice include examples of performance indicators, particularly those that are important for indigenous people?*

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS: Principle # 1

The multi-species approach outlined in Principle 1, is seen as recognizing the interconnectedness of species and ecosystems.

"I like that they are doing a multi-species approach so many other species live and use the area not just one, we believe that we are all connected so we all need care."

However, although participants agreed with the multi-species approach, they raised some questions about the scope and implementation of considerations.

Global Challenges & Treaties

One key concern raised during the discussion on Principle 1 is the need to “*think globally, not by country [because we] need to protect all,*” recognizing the wide variety of at-risk species including whales, coral reefs, and environmental issues like rising ocean temperatures and melting glaciers further affect conservation efforts. As a result, global challenges like climate change are being taken into consideration.

“I would like to know if we take into consideration climate change and the development and or erosion of these is taken into consideration?”

“Concerns have increased [around] protected lands, parks, new treaty lands .. and the conservation of the rainforest and the coast,

Other concerns raised include

..... “leaching tanker boats and cruise ships that are killing the whales by brute force.

.... “increased temperatures of the ocean, the corrosion of reefs whitening, melting glaciers and increased drought, .. [and] radioactive waters into the ocean.”

Community involvement and training opportunities

A sentiment was expressed that communities should be involved in tracking and measuring conservation efforts. Communities should be invited to forums where milestones of conservation efforts are analyzed. Training, incentives, and projects should also be offered within Indigenous communities to help them stay involved and informed.

“Come up with forums that seek to analyze the milestones we are achieving and the protection of aqua species. it will help to identify the gaps that are there.”

“DFO should have First Nations communities sitting at the table to bring knowledge and balance.”

“Programs/projects within the Aboriginal community and/or township.... possibilities of training, incentives etc.”

Principle 2: Respect Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, incorporate Indigenous perspectives and enhance opportunities for Indigenous leadership.

DFO is committed to building renewed nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown, and government-to-government relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership.

Best practices include:

1. Engaging with interested Indigenous Peoples to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous input, knowledge and perspectives inform multi-species approaches.
 - Supporting the use of ongoing and effective engagement mechanisms and enabling new opportunities for engagement. For example, the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk supports the development of Indigenous capacity to participate actively in the implementation of SARA.

- The Indigenous Habitat Participation Program (IHHP) gives Indigenous communities opportunities to participate in the conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat.
2. Enhancing opportunities for involvement of Indigenous Peoples in multi-species recovery and protection actions that may allow for capacity building, training, and leadership in aquatic species at risk conservation; and,
 3. Establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships and networks with Indigenous Peoples (such as advisory councils, collaborative management arrangements, and bilateral discussions).

Questions

1. *Should the definition in best practice # 2, state more clearly how opportunities will be enhanced?*

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS: Principle # 2

There is support for this principle due to its inclusivity and acknowledgment of Indigenous rights and knowledge; however, it is believed that the principle is just a start. Further details about its implementation in practice will help to enhance the principle.

"Love this principle due to its inclusivity."

"...Until [Indigenous Peoples] are considered in policy and decision-making making, there will be gaps in the management of the fish and habitat together with the environment in general. So just that emphasis on the importance of this principle."

"... I like that they're finally recognizing our rights and respecting our opinions. So, kudos for this principle"

Indigenous leadership & increased funding

There is much to learn from tapping into the knowledge of Indigenous communities and there is great potential in enabling Indigenous leadership of conservation efforts. This sentiment was shared while citing success in Australia as evidence. Lived experience is especially valuable and Indigenous Peoples have a lot to contribute to this conversation. Hence, rather than just inclusion, consideration should be put toward Indigenous leadership in these efforts.

"I know that through experiences, either direct or indirect Indigenous Peoples have more understanding about the fish and their habitat."

"We need to listen to scientists like Dr. Suzuki, and Inuit for policies...look at how Australia is reclaiming all parks to Indigenous Peoples as land stewards."

".....Need to advocate and move to the implementation stage."

"Perhaps Indigenous nations should be leading these initiatives."

Greater funding is also required for Indigenous stewardship, as this would be beneficial for Indigenous involvement in protection initiatives.

"Funding would encourage Indigenous Peoples to be more involved in protecting the aquatic species."

Additionally, the DFO should learn from the past when seeking to include Indigenous communities in their conservation efforts.

“What history has DFO looked at in terms of inclusion of First Nations in the communities that they live in?”

Principle 3: Form strong partnerships in conservation.

DFO recognizes the importance of partnerships and collaboration in the recovery and protection of aquatic species at risk.

Best Practices include:

1. Implementing effective and diverse engagement
2. Providing opportunities for building partnerships
3. Collaborating with Indigenous Peoples and Provinces and Territories which enables the use of the best available information; and
4. Sharing of information, experiences and expertise, such as the creation of platforms which can facilitate collaboration and information sharing on multi-species approaches across Canada.

Question

1. *Do you think best practice # 1 is too broad in its definition?*
2. *How can best practice # 1 be redefined to include engagement that is beneficial to indigenous people?*
3. *Should best practice # 4 include the standardization of data collection?*

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS: Principle # 3

Principle 3 is seen to be very important, with some recognizing the development of this principle as an improvement over past efforts (or lack of) to involve Indigenous People.

“In the past DFO never included Indigenous People fully in other projects so kudos for starting now.”

Build relationships with community members.

It is essential to have strong partnerships and collaboration between Indigenous communities and the DFO. To form these partnerships, it is believed that the DFO should go directly to the source – visit communities in person and engage with the people whose lives are impacted by at-risk species.

“Go to the source with our communities, teach children to fish teach women and children about fishing and land-based hunting. If all food stores were closed, we would need to hunt for our own food again, most folks would not know how. So, excellent, practical idea.”

“From a youth perspective, I recently went to a youth conference and we were saying how often do people from DFO, or someone from like that organization come to specific communities that are experiencing a decline in their fisheries, or something that's affecting their way of life in terms of water or food? It [principle 3] says providing opportunities for building partnerships. So, I'm wondering, how often do they come out and send out somebody to talk to these communities?”

“Providing platforms where everyone can give their contribution regardless of their level in the community. People at the ground level interact directly with the environment and I believe they can give solutions to some challenges.”

“Also, DFO needs to engage with grassroots organizations.”

Public awareness and education

It is felt that principle five should be expanded to include public awareness and education to mitigate against possible resource use conflicts.

“..... I think another best practice that we might want to consider is the public awareness piece, to try to help avoid conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous land users and resource users ... we've seen what's happened with the (Mic-Maw) on the eastern coast of Canada and the fisheries folks over in those areas.

“So, I think sometimes, you know, I live in Alberta, and we have non-Indigenous folks in this province who are taking, they're up in arms with some of this stuff. ... it's causing conflict between us and municipalities and us and other folks that have an interest in these resources.

“So, I think we need to have a way to try to mitigate that conflict through public awareness and education.”

Diverse engagement

Building partnerships should also involve diverse engagement with participants and engaging with community members from different nations to ensure a diverse range of Indigenous perspectives are included.

'I would like to see DFO invite community members from different nations because the goals of the individual nations may not align with the community projection of salmon and other water species.'

“it's essential to have partnerships and collaboration. Nice to see Two Spirits, LGBTQ environmentalists, and Indigenous Nations all together, have that power in numbers.”

Defend the role of Indigenous People

As traditional keepers of the land, the role of Indigenous people in conservation and preservation needs to be better defended by the government. This means engaging non-Indigenous people and helping them understand their rights.

“Beyond diverse engagement, Canada needs to defend the role of Indigenous peoples when we are challenged.”

“Maybe educating non-Indigenous people, explaining to them what needs to be done, as well.”

Principle 4: Strengthened Knowledge Base for Decision Making

In implementing multi-species approaches, decision-making should be knowledge-based.

Best practices include:

1. Identifying and understanding knowledge gaps and limitations in developing and implementing multi-species approaches.
2. Working towards a better understanding of species interactions within an ecosystem and, their threats by respecting and meaningfully considering Indigenous Knowledge and a variety of scientific sources.
3. Exercising balanced precautions in managing uncertainty with respect to the species, their interactions and their ecosystems.
4. Communicating the transparent decision-making processes in developing and implementing multi-species approaches.

Questions

1. *Do you think the phrase “meaningfully considering Indigenous Knowledge” in best practice # 2 gives enough attention to Indigenous Knowledge?*
2. *How could best practice # 2 be rewritten to give greater acknowledgement of the value of Indigenous knowledge?*

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS: Principle # 4

Respect & Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge

Although there is support for the intent of Principle 4, it is felt the words “meaningful considering” do not place enough importance on Indigenous knowledge. The sentiment expressed was that the existing wording gave the impression that Indigenous knowledge would be a “consideration” rather than integral to decision-making.

“I feel like that’s saying like [we] will partially take into consideration Indigenous knowledge... it says, like, meaningfully considering Indigenous knowledge and a variety of scientific sources. I feel like that should be like two different objectives.”

There is a desire to see Indigenous knowledge being respected and used alongside scientific sources and given equal weight.

“I’d like to see respect given to Indigenous knowledge keepers and not just science-based knowledge.”

“Indigenous Knowledge (oral tradition) should be equal to written knowledge.”

“Indigenous knowledge should be implemented for sure! Everyone working together.”

Engaging Grassroots Organizations

There is the belief that grassroots organizations can play an important role in aiding the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in conservation efforts.

“DFO should engage with grassroots organizations as well.”

Principle 5: Adaptive management

Adaptive management allows for the opportunity to adjust the Framework as new information becomes available. It can also help support flexibility and innovation in addressing new and existing challenges such as climate change.

Best Practices include:

1. Setting clear objectives for the use of multi-species approaches, ensuring that objectives are linked to improved conservation outcomes for aquatic species at risk (such as population and distribution objectives defined in Recovery Strategies).
2. Developing performance tools and strong monitoring plans to evaluate the effectiveness of multi-species approaches in meeting their objectives.
3. Considering new information and by engaging with Indigenous Peoples, partners, and stakeholders.
4. Developing a guiding timeline that is associated with cyclical review and adaptive management.

Questions

1. *Should we include a best practice that considers how sudden changes in environmental conditions and the management of those changes might affect Indigenous values and Indigenous treaty rights?*

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS: Principle # 5

Adaptive management is seen as necessary for managing resources because information and circumstances related to conservation are dynamic. It is felt that adaptive management aligns with Indigenous approaches and that learnings from successes and failures should always be integrated to improve on current methods.

“Knowledge is dynamic and from time to time new ideas will come up, so management should be flexible enough to embrace the new information that surfaces and consider it if it's beneficial to the ecosystem.”

“It's okay to try new ways or solutions if the previous .. ones produce negative results.”

“I believe continuous education ... can have a great impact. Also, the policies in place may be adjusted to fit the current situation..... You see this happening on First Nations all the time”

Joint-Resource Management & Shared Authority

Concerns about this approach stem from the role Indigenous People might play in adaptive management. There is the belief that a joint approach that includes Indigenous people would be appropriate, especially given the value of Indigenous knowledge and the role of Indigenous people as traditional caretakers of the land. However, it was stated that Indigenous people view their role as even larger than is stated in the principles.

“We [Indigenous people] should be equal to Canada and not just seen as an interested party or a stakeholder. 'Indigenous peoples in Canada have the knowledge and the skill to jointly manage the resources, habitats, and wildlife. This needs to be honored and reflected in each principle, we need to be acknowledged as rights holders and the original caretakers of the land. We have 1,000's of years of experience, collectively.”

“Shared authority, is the point I am attempting to make - we should be equal to Canada and not seen as just an interested party or stakeholder.”

Interconnected species and resources

Principle five is also seen as important because fish, especially salmon, are important natural resources. When thinking about how to manage at-risk species, it is believed that it is important to expand the focus to other interconnected species.

“This is a big one, especially for Indigenous communities that consume salmon because of climate change and large fishing companies making it difficult for me to fish.”

"We should not only manage habitat and resources for the species at risk but also the species that are necessary for the species at risk to thrive - there is interconnectedness between species."

"A species at risk may rely on another species that is not at risk therefore the second species or other connected species should be considered also. "For example, for certain marine species, terrestrial environments are vital to their survival, salmon Conservation of salmon must include protection for cedar forests as well as riparian areas and wetlands. This should be considered for protected areas, as protection must extend beyond the water line."