



FISHERIES SECTOR

What has the AFN's Fisheries Sector worked on over the last quarter?

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, fisheries and aquaculture were immediately identified as essential services as they are part of the food supply chain. Following a meeting between Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Minister Bernadette Jordan and the National Fisheries Committee co-chairs, Regional Chief Roger Augustine and Regional Chief Terry Teegee, in April 2020, Minister Jordan met with the Executive Committee. At this virtual meeting, each Regional Chief voiced the COVID-19 related concerns from their constituents on fisheries activities. Some of the concerns expressed, included the lack of details on how the fishing industry can access the \$470 million relief package that was announced by the Prime Minister on May 14; additionally, there was no indication from DFO that there will be specific funds set aside for First Nations fishers.

The AFN's Fisheries Sector advocated for First Nations rights and interests during the Bill C-68 legislative amendments to the *Fisheries Act*. The Sector held two regional technical workshops on changes to the *Fisheries Act* and Indigenous Knowledge protocols in Halifax and Winnipeg. There are plans to complete the third in the series of workshops, in Vancouver, once meeting and travel restrictions are waived.

The National Aquaculture Working Group (NAWG) was relaunched in 2017 and operations were regularized and strengthened during 2019-2020. In-person and virtual meetings provided an opportunity to exchange information and address ongoing interests and operational issues associated with aquaculture practices, policies, science, regulations and programs.

The AFN continues to pursue the co-development of a new Aquaculture Act to include First Nations perspectives. The Fisheries Sector established an Indigenous Knowledge Advisory Group (IKAG) of technical experts, Elders, and Indigenous knowledge holders to support the analysis and development of policy related to Indigenous Knowledge. It also initiated an inventory of publicly available Indigenous Knowledge protocols within different First Nations, which is critical as Indigenous Knowledge will be considered in the *Fisheries Act* and other federal/provincial/territorial governments.

The Inland Working Group met with the federal Interlocutor for the Freshwater Fisheries Marketing Committee (FFMC) in March 2020 to directly engage and highlight important issues to be shared with the federal DFO Minister.

The Oceans Working Group continued policy work related to the Oceans Protection Plan, marine spatial planning, marine protected areas, including marine Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

Under the leadership of National Chief Perry Bellegarde and portfolio holder Regional Chief Roger Augustine, on June 7, 2019, the Minister of DFO launched the \$50 million Indigenous Habitat



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Participation Program to support Indigenous Peoples' participation in engagement opportunities related to the implementation of fish and fish habitat protection, build capacity in the area of fish habitat and aquatic ecosystems, and support collaborative activities. This program has been renewed for 2020-2021. The DFO priority for this program is to make funds available to Inland Indigenous groups.

In late June 2019, a rockslide was discovered in a narrow portion of the Fraser River near Big Bar, British Columbia, which created a 5m high barrier to salmon migration. Chiefs-in-Assembly passed resolutions to call on the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia to declare a state of emergency for Fraser River Salmon (Resolution no. 52/2019 and Resolution no. 113/2019). This included prioritization of the work needed to clear the area of debris to ensure the safe passage of all salmon returning next season. Crews have undertaken work to clear the site that has continued, with health and safety precautions, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. This natural disaster has worsened food security issues for BC First Nations. The AFN Fisheries Sector continues to advocate that First Nations' fisheries for food, social, and ceremonial are prioritized over all other resource users.

What is your Sector planning for the future?

The AFN Fisheries Sector will continue advocacy work related to the Fisheries Act and its implementation, especially in relation to Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and call on DFO to fund work for First Nations to develop their community Indigenous Knowledge protocols and related activities.

On aquaculture, AFN Fisheries Sector, working with NAWG, will facilitate input on the General Aquaculture Regulations and co-develop, design, and deliver the proposed federal Aquaculture Act, regulations, policies, and programs. AFN Fisheries will continue to build relationships with the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers (CCFAM) to facilitate First Nations' engagement in this body.

The Sector will continue to advocate for the recognition and implementation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the marine environment and will participate in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Additionally, the AFN Fisheries Sector will continue to engage on the national Ocean Supercluster Initiative to ensure that technological innovations resulting from partnership initiatives are made available to First Nations, employment opportunities for First Nations are prioritized, and other First Nations issues are addressed.

Upcoming Events

- May 2021 - AFN National Fisheries Forum "Rebuilding Fish Nations" – details TBA