



Engaging on a strategy to restore and rebuild Atlantic salmon



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

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1. Minister's Message

Wild Atlantic salmon is an iconic species in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, valued by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities for generations. Over 40 First Nations and Indigenous communities fish Atlantic salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes, while salmon angling is a popular recreational activity for residents and visitors alike, promoting tourism and an appreciation for the natural beauty of Eastern Canada. The species is crucial to the ecological, cultural, and economic fabric of our coastal communities.

We know that Atlantic salmon populations face many threats linked to human activity, from loss of natural habitat, sedimentation, pollution and challenges related to climate change. This is why the Government of Canada is committed to maintaining and restoring this important species, with management and conservation decisions that reflect the strong connections people have with salmon.

Recognizing the many perspectives on the conservation of Atlantic salmon, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) took time to engage with Canadians and seek their thoughts on how best to achieve our goal of maintaining and restoring healthy populations.

Almost 500 individuals and groups have contributed to this process, submitting their comments and participating in bilateral and group discussions. As the management of Atlantic salmon is shared between DFO and provincial governments, I would also like to recognize the ongoing engagement of the five provinces where Atlantic salmon occur.

DFO's ongoing discussions with Indigenous peoples are vital to developing a strategy to maintain and restore Atlantic salmon, taking into account this species' cultural significance. DFO has strong relationships with partner organizations that do much of the on-the-ground work in salmon restoration and looks forward to continuing to build relationships with them, including First Nations and Indigenous communities, who will be critical in conserving this important species.

In closing, I would especially like to thank the hundreds of Canadians who helped inform this report, by filling out a questionnaire or attending a meeting or workshop – you have made all the difference. I want you to know that your contributions are critical to developing a roadmap for the future of Wild Atlantic salmon in Eastern Canada.

The Honourable Diane Lebovillier, P.C., M.P.

Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard



2. Introduction and background: towards a conservation strategy for Atlantic salmon

In 2018, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) published the [Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy](#) (the Policy) to provide a framework for the Government of Canada to meet its objectives for the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. The Policy goal is to restore and maintain healthy wild Atlantic salmon populations. To support the achievement of the Policy goal, DFO then introduced the Wild Atlantic salmon conservation: Implementation Plan 2019 to 2021 (Implementation Plan 2019-2021) to direct priority actions. While the Implementation Plan 2019-2021 laid out an ambitious program of work, DFO was challenged to address all 18 action items simultaneously during the two-year period. As a result, progress on action items within and across themes was uneven and, in a number of areas, fell short of the desired outcome. As indicated in its [Status Report \(2022\)](#), several important lessons were identified from the work undertaken over the course of the Implementation Plan 2019-2021:

- Threats and activities must be prioritized to strengthen delivery of results over the long-term.
- The strategic allocation of resources will be important to support conservation and protection measures.
- Considerations of scale need to be addressed.
- Partnerships must remain essential.
- Diverse types of knowledge must be incorporated into planning and decisions making.

Recognizing these lessons, the ongoing relevancy of the Policy goal, and the importance of Atlantic salmon to Indigenous peoples and Canadians, the Government of Canada made a commitment in 2021 to “work in close collaboration with provincial and territorial authorities, Indigenous partners, fishing and stewardship organizations and implicated communities ... to make new investments and develop a conservation strategy to restore and rebuild wild Atlantic salmon populations and their habitats.”

In response to the mandate commitment, DFO began drafting the elements of the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Strategy (the Strategy) through extensive engagement with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous organizations, partners (including provincial governments) and stakeholders. In addition to reflecting feedback received through engagement, the draft elements of the Conservation Strategy built upon the extensive work already undertaken through the Policy, Implementation Plan 2019-2021, Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans “[Wild Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada” report \(2017\)](#), as well as the Minister’s Advisory Committee “[Special Report on Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada” \(2015\)](#).

Based on everything we have learned and heard, the proposed Strategy will provide direction for Atlantic salmon conservation activities, to restore and rebuild Atlantic salmon populations across its Canadian range.

Management context for Atlantic salmon in Eastern Canada

The protection and management of wild Atlantic salmon is shared across multiple jurisdictions and levels of government, hence the importance of pursuing the goal of restoring and maintaining healthy Atlantic salmon populations collaboratively.

While the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has the authority and tools to manage Atlantic salmon under federal legislations, provincial governments also have powers with respect to the management of this species and their habitat in inland waters. In the Maritime provinces, this includes issuing licenses for recreational angling for salmon and other matters of a provincial nature (e.g., watercourse alterations, forestry). In Newfoundland and Labrador, DFO manages the recreational fishery, the province is responsible for access, and both DFO and the province have a shared responsibility over the fisheries in non-tidal waters. The Province of Quebec has been delegated the management of freshwater fish, as well as diadromous species like Atlantic salmon, in the inland and tidal waters of Quebec.

3. Engagement process: an ongoing conversation

The engagement process for developing the Strategy has been characterized as an ‘ongoing conversation,’ which has allowed us to be responsive to both shifting contexts (e.g., a new mandate commitment), as well as what we heard and learned through successive discussions. This continual engagement has provided and will continue to provide numerous opportunities for Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and all Canadians to contribute to the Strategy, using a variety of in-person and online forums.

3.1 Phase I: Early engagement

Early engagement (July 2021 to May 2022) focused on the near-completion of the Implementation Plan 2019-2021 and lessons learned throughout its two year lifespan. Feedback from Phase I discussions was used to report on the status of the Implementation Plan 2019-2021, as well as to inform the development of draft elements of the Strategy.

Activities during this early phase of engagement focused on discussions with Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders, both individually and within existing Atlantic salmon oriented advisory boards and committees.

3.2 Phase II: Draft elements of the Strategy

This second phase of engagement (May 2022 to December 2022) focused on refining draft elements of the vision, key pillars, and objectives, as well as exploring opportunities and challenges related to Atlantic salmon conservation, prior to development of the draft the Strategy. These elements were developed based on what we heard and learned through earlier engagement activities, as well as extensive review of existing reports, recommendations, scientific advice, proposals, and other sources relating to Atlantic salmon.

A variety of approaches were developed to collect feedback from Indigenous peoples, partners, and stakeholders, including:

Bilateral discussions and discussions at existing advisory boards and committees

Bilateral meetings were held between DFO and a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Where they exist, discussions were facilitated at Atlantic salmon oriented advisory boards and committees.

Partner symposia

Facilitated discussions were hosted by the Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon's series of Partnership Symposia in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. A presentation was also made at the Atlantic Salmon Knowledge Forum organized by the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique and the Interuniversity Centre for Atlantic Salmon Research in April 2023.

On-line engagement

An online platform, Let's Talk Atlantic Salmon, was developed to facilitate the collection of feedback through a diversity of tools, recognizing the varied needs and preferences of individual participants.

- **Questionnaire:** Provided participants with an opportunity to voice their opinion in a convenient and structured way.
- **Ideas:** Offered virtual post-it notes for participants to share ideas and build a collective board.
- **Uploads:** Enabled organizations to upload position statements, proposals, or more in-depth feedback representing their respective mandates.

Youth engagement

Targeted university presentations and facilitated discussions were used to increase participation by this under-represented demographic (18-24 years).

Review of the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy and draft elements of the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Strategy through the lens of Indigenous governance and sovereignty

The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat retained the services of Indigenous Minds Consulting to conduct a review of the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy and draft Strategy, to explore their alignment with Canada's Constitution Act, Fisheries Act, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. DFO is currently reviewing this report.

3.3 Phase III: Feedback on complete draft of the Strategy

This phase (coming later in 2023) will provide an opportunity to review and comment on a draft Conservation Strategy.

4. Who we heard from

The extensive time and effort contributed by those who have participated in the Strategy engagement activities to date is a testament to the dedication and commitment that is shared by all of those whose lives and livelihoods are touched by Atlantic salmon. Engagement with Indigenous peoples across the range of Atlantic salmon are ongoing, pursuant to mutually agreed upon consultation and engagement protocols.

Since July 2021, the Department has conducted more than 60 meetings with participants representing approximately 80 organizations. To build on and respect existing local relationships between DFO and Indigenous peoples, partners, and stakeholders, many discussions were hosted by DFO regional staff across the range of wild Atlantic salmon, including Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Feedback received through Phase I engagement was used to support the development of the draft elements of the Strategy, presented in Phase II. Discussions were ongoing throughout Phase II, during which time feedback was also accepted through the online platform Let's Talk Atlantic Salmon.



Postal code information offered through Let's Talk Atlantic Salmon indicated that more than 99% of participants reside in Canada, with representation across 8 provinces and territories. The majority of participants were residents of New Brunswick (40%), followed by Nova Scotia (29%).

The age groups of individuals who participated through this online engagement process were predominantly over the age of 65 (42%) or between the age of 55-64 (18%). Participation from younger audiences between the age of 18-24 was limited (5%). Which led to a targeted approach for younger audiences through facilitated discussions at two universities. Participants were predominately male

(87%). To address gender bias in online participation, efforts were made to bilaterally engage with women working in the salmon community and organizations headed by women.

5. What we heard

The feedback provided to DFO is organized under four topics that were explored during engagement on the draft elements of the Strategy:

1. Refining the vision for Atlantic salmon conservation
2. Key Pillar I: Addressing key threats
3. Key Pillar II: Prioritizing and adopting collaborative management approaches
4. Key Pillar III: Strong leadership, coordination, and accountability

Comments and feedback received through all sources throughout Strategy engagement to date were considered during the preparation of this report.

5.1 Refining the visions for Atlantic salmon conservation

Many participants expanded on their vision for Atlantic salmon and several common themes emerged from the analysis of these views, including:

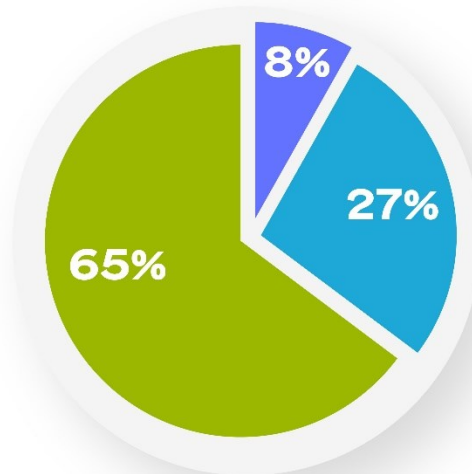
- i. **a future that includes Atlantic salmon** as a legacy for generations to come;
- ii. **a vision that recognizes the importance of Atlantic salmon fisheries** to the cultures of Indigenous peoples, and to the economies and identities of many Canadians in Quebec and Atlantic Canada. This vision includes wild Atlantic salmon and stocked Atlantic salmon where populations have been effectively lost, to restore access to fisheries;
- iii. **a future where key threats are mitigated** with emphasis on mitigating those within freshwater, riparian, and coastal environments that are within our jurisdiction to control, and;
- iv. **an ecosystem approach** to achieve the interconnected goals of restoring ecosystem connectivity, healthy salmon populations, and sustained human connections with Atlantic salmon over the long-term.

5.2 Lifetime of the strategy

Most respondents preferred a strategy that would be achieved over the long term, with 65% of participants opting for the lifetime of the strategy to be 15 years.

What should the lifetime of the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Strategy be?

- ▶ **5 years** (approx. one salmon generation)
- ▶ **10 years** (approx. two salmon generations)
- ▶ **15 years** (approx. three salmon generations)



5.3 Addressing key threats

The analysis of feedback relating to Key Pillar I – Addressing key threats indicates a desire for the Strategy to focus capacity and future efforts towards the mitigation of key threats that are already known to limit the restoration of Atlantic salmon populations. Throughout the engagement period, many expressed the view that enough resources had gone towards studying threats. It was felt that now it is time to put our knowledge into action. Overall, there is broad support for the specific objectives proposed in key pillar I:

- **Objective 1.1:** To decrease salmon mortality in our waters and Canadian-origin salmon mortality internationally, while respecting socially and culturally valuable fisheries.
- **Objective 1.2:** To ensure that the quality, quantity, and accessibility of freshwater habitat does not limit the conservation of Atlantic salmon.
- **Objective 1.3:** To understand and mitigate current and future impacts of marine threats on Atlantic salmon stocks, to the greatest extent possible.

Many participants identified specific threats that they considered to be impacting salmon populations, including: aquaculture, forestry, warming waters and domestic poaching. A variety of solutions for how to mitigate these threats were also proposed, and often referenced the need for large scale regulatory change or partnership to be achieved; for example: the mitigation of risks posed by open-net pen aquaculture, creating larger buffers around riparian zones in forestry operations; and more funding for provincial and federal enforcement activities and/or guardian programs.

Although many comments received under Key Pillar I related to threats and impacts to Atlantic salmon in one specific river, watershed, or region, three themes emerged from the analysis that broadly apply to Atlantic salmon conservation across their range, including:

- i) Managing costs and benefits of existing fisheries;
- ii) Conservation in the context of environmental change; and,
- iii) Managing the manageable.

Managing costs and benefits of existing fisheries

Many participants stated their support for recreational fisheries - catch and release fisheries in particular for a number of reasons including:

- the value of keeping eyes on the water as a tactic to reduce poaching;
- the stewardship value of fishing, as it can generate private and public funds for Atlantic salmon conservation and habitat work; and,
- the economic value of recreational fisheries for rural communities.

Others felt that any harm to salmon through fisheries – including incidental harm during catch and release fisheries – should be eliminated.

The rights of Indigenous peoples to access Atlantic salmon for food, social, and ceremonial (FSC) purposes was of the highest importance to many Indigenous peoples, and these rights need to be clearly communicated, understood and respected by Canada and all Canadians. Many Indigenous peoples and organizations expressed their concern that the term “conservation” has often been interpreted as a means to limit their rights-based fisheries. At the same time, many Indigenous peoples expressed hope for a future in which they could achieve autonomy and sovereignty in making fisheries management decisions, especially in the context of established Indigenous success stories.

In general, many participants felt that the language proposed in Objective 1.1, “to decrease salmon mortality in our waters and Canadian-origin salmon mortality internationally....” was unclear and specific recommendations were provided to improve its interpretation. Managing the risk of continued fishing, especially where populations are low, with an understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, and stewardship benefits of Canada’s Atlantic salmon fisheries was top of mind for many participants, as was the need for education on, and continued implementation of, FSC fisheries by Indigenous peoples.

Conservation in the context of environmental change

Many participants noted that the freshwater and marine environments in which Atlantic salmon live are undergoing rapid change. References to environmental change were varied and included direct climate change impacts, warming freshwater temperatures, changes in the distribution and abundance of Atlantic salmon predators, the abundance of aquatic invasive species in freshwater, and the rapid development and/or exploitation of coastal, riparian and freshwater environments.

Indigenous peoples in particular called for an ecosystem approach to Atlantic salmon conservation, which would acknowledge and be responsive to large-scale environmental change.

In addition to the many direct impacts that environmental change can have on Atlantic salmon populations, some participants also discussed the interaction of climate change with fisheries, for example: higher mortality of catch and release fisheries during periods of warm water, and higher susceptibility and stress caused by poaching during periods of low water. When threats relating to environmental change were identified, participants often called for urgent action to mitigate them.

Managing the manageable

While nearly all participants supported objective 1.3 in the questionnaire, “understanding and mitigating impacts of marine threats on Atlantic salmon in the marine environment”, analysis of all feedback received throughout engagement revealed that most participants favour an approach to conservation that focuses on freshwater threats (e.g., restoring connectivity within and between ecosystems, poaching, aquatic invasive species, etc.).

The main exception to this freshwater focus was aquaculture which was viewed by some participants to be within Canada’s span of control and of high importance to the conservation and restoration of Atlantic salmon.

The marine environment, on the other hand, was often described as a ‘black box’ throughout the engagement period, as there remain significant gaps in understanding of the ecology and threats facing salmon at sea. There was also acknowledgement that many marine threats are outside of Canada’s jurisdiction, for example: legal and illegal fisheries in international waters, global changes to marine productivity and food webs. Paired with an understanding that resources and capacity for Atlantic salmon are limited, many felt that adopting a conservation philosophy of ‘managing the manageable’ would be a more effective approach for the Strategy.

How these management decisions are made, and by whom, continued to be an important theme raised by many partners and stakeholders, and in particular, by Indigenous peoples who felt continually left out of decision making processes.

5.4 Prioritizing and adopting collaborative management approaches

Overall, there is broad support for the specific objectives proposed in Key Pillar II – Prioritizing and adopting collaborative management approaches:

- **Objective 2.1:** To prioritize conservation efforts and investments that support achievable ecological, social, cultural and/or economic benefits.
- **Objective 2.2:** To actively pilot place-based collaborative management approaches.
- **Objective 2.3:** To effectively manage the production of all Atlantic salmon reared for conservation purposes.

Although most participants supported the draft objectives, it was also indicated that the meaning and interpretation of language in Pillar II needs to be clarified, for example: how will conservation efforts be prioritized (objective 2.1), and what does it mean to effectively manage the production of Atlantic salmon for conservation purposes (objective 2.3). Additionally, there was frustration expressed by some participants, that salmon populations continue to decline over the course of lengthy discussions and decision-making processes, and that the expertise and advice of Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders has gone undervalued. Participants once again expressed the view that urgent action is required in order to conserve and restore Atlantic salmon populations. DFO and other jurisdictions responsible for the management of Atlantic salmon and its habitat were called upon to collaborate with Indigenous peoples, provincial governments, and conservation organizations on the water to take action.

Indigenous peoples in Quebec have also stated their desire for cohesion between DFO's Strategy and the management of Atlantic salmon by the Government of Quebec, and for greater inclusion and collaboration with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous organizations in decision-making.

Despite differing views expressed on topics including the exploitation of salmon populations for economic purposes, and the appropriate use of enhancement (stocking), three themes emerged from analysis of feedback in Key Pillar II, including:

- i. Strong support and desire for river-by-river management approaches;
- ii. Barriers to collaborative management exist within DFO; and,
- iii. Taking a balanced approach to Atlantic salmon enhancement activities.

Strong support and desire for collaborative place-based management approaches

Many expressed their desire for river-by-river management approaches, or watershed-level approaches, that would provide a greater role to Indigenous peoples, partners, and local organizations. Many specific rivers and watersheds across the Atlantic provinces were referenced as currently having the capacity and being ready to formalize approaches. There was familiarity with Quebec's river-by-river management system, which participants often praised and aspired to emulate. Overall, participants expressed an openness to trying approaches similar to Quebec's, as well as to experimenting with approaches that would be uniquely developed for specific rivers or watersheds. In all cases, collaboration was the key element of any place-based management approach with many expressing their desire for pilot projects to be partner-led, as opposed to DFO-led. Specific elements of collaborative place-based management approach were explored in a separate question, and participants indicated that the three most important features for any approach include: Atlantic salmon population monitoring activities (75%), collaboration with organizations on the water (74%) and established communication channels between DFO and stakeholders (67%).

Indigenous communities and organizations in particular highlighted their readiness to take a leadership role on rivers within their communities and/or territories and highlighted the many scientific, restoration, and management activities already underway. The need to take an ecosystem approach to management was often raised by Indigenous peoples and was viewed as an important consideration for place-based management approach.

The potential financial cost of river-by-river management was acknowledged by some, alongside the need for more funding to effectively implement these approaches.

Barriers to place-based collaborative management approaches exist within DFO

Many participants expressed concern that key barriers to the successful implementation of collaborative management approaches exist within DFO, including: individual and organizational attitudes towards Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders; the Department's organizational structure and complexity; and limited opportunities for collaboration, inclusion and innovation.

In turn, specific input on the actions the Department could take in order to support successful collaborative management approaches were identified, including:

- building trust between DFO and Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders;

- adopting timely service standards for the review and approval scientific and research permits;
- creating longer-term solutions for funding and permitting processes and aligning these processes;
- ensuring consistency between science and management decisions;
- increasing timeliness and transparency in decision making; and,
- facilitating two-eyed seeing approaches (i.e., people coming together to view the world through an Indigenous lens with one eye, while the other eye sees through a Western lens) and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous peoples in particular expressed their expectation to be included in collaborative management activities, as an expression of their inherent right to self-governance. Many barriers to achieving sovereignty were identified and extended well beyond the scope of Atlantic salmon management.

Overall, better coordination, enhanced collaboration in decision making, and openness to trying new things are all desired in the pursuit of place-based management approaches.

Take a balanced approach to enhancement

While feedback on stocking (the deliberate release of fish into the wild at any life stage for any purpose) spanned the full range from ‘do not stock’ to ‘invest in hatcheries like the Pacific region’, a strong voice for the middle ground was heard: use stocking as a management tool where populations are low, alongside other conservation measures (e.g., habitat restoration, predator management activities, and elimination of aquatic invasive species). Others expressed their desire for policy guidance to support decision making on stocking, a desire for more collaborative decision making in regard to stocking proposals, and a desire to improve stocking practices in a way that could reduce risks and enhance benefits. Indigenous peoples expressed interest in how stocking could be used as a tool to ensure social, cultural, and ecological connections to salmon are maintained for the next generations, and to restore access to Rights-based fisheries. In general, feedback suggests that Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders, are aware of past commitments made by the Department to provide policy direction on stocking, and are eager to engage on this topic regardless of the position they hold.

5.5 Strong leadership, coordination, and accountability

The analysis of feedback relating to Key Pillar III – Strong leadership, coordination, and accountability - highlighted the knowledge and experience held within the Atlantic salmon community, as well as the depth and complexity of existing relationships between DFO and the individuals, communities, and organizations who make up this community. Overall, there is broad support for the specific objectives proposed in Key Pillar III:

- **Objective 3.1:** This objective and associated targets are to be established through ongoing engagement with Indigenous people, to recognize the rights, relationship and values of Indigenous people.
- **Objective 3.2:** To strengthen Canada’s approach domestically and internationally, including at the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), as a leader in Atlantic salmon conservation.

- **Objective 3.3:** To enhance transparency, accountability, and coordination to support better relationships and conservation outcomes.

While support does exist for the draft objectives proposed in Key Pillar III, many participants expressed frustration with respect to the status quo of DFO's approach to Atlantic salmon science and management. Overall, there is a strong desire for the Department to change its approach with respect to governance, Indigenous relations, and its relationships with all those in the Atlantic salmon community.

A number of themes emerged in the analysis of feedback on Key Pillar III, including:

- i. opportunities for Indigenous leadership and reconciliation;
- ii. core leadership attributes;
- iii. better mobilization of people, data, and projects; and,
- iv. relationships based on strong communication, coordination, and collaboration.

Opportunities for Indigenous leadership and reconciliation

Through ongoing discussions with Indigenous peoples across the range of Atlantic salmon, the need to recognize and prioritize Indigenous rights was often raised, as was the ongoing need to build nation to nation relationships in the context of Atlantic salmon management. With respect to proposing a specific objective to recognize the rights, relationship and values of Indigenous peoples (objective 3.1), sentiments were mixed: on one hand, some Indigenous peoples expressed feeling limited or 'boxed in' by having one dedicated objective; on the other hand, some Indigenous people supported having dedicated space where their specific aspirations and goals could be met. Overall, Indigenous peoples expect to be meaningfully included throughout the strategy, and ultimately in all aspects of Atlantic salmon conservation, restoration and management. Given the passion and mutual desire for healthy Atlantic salmon populations that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people share, it was felt that Atlantic salmon could serve as a tool to foster relationships, and to more broadly support reconciliation. The need for more education amongst the general public on Indigenous and Treaty rights was also apparent.

Core leadership attributes

Participants identified a variety of leadership qualities that they felt would be important to successfully deliver on the Strategy. These leadership qualities included: trust, vision, clear communication, accountability, consistency in decision making processes and outcomes, transparency, openness to new ideas and information (especially from external sources), embracing innovation, being inclusive, and creating unity across the Atlantic salmon network. For many, leadership should be aspirational for DFO, not assumed. For Indigenous peoples in particular, who expressed a clear call for co-management, DFO leadership was understood to mean taking an active role in the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDRIP) and broader Government of Canada commitments towards reconciliation.

Better mobilization of people, data, and projects

Many participants have had, or currently have, working relationships with DFO and described feelings of frustration with individuals, sections, and the Department as a whole, when it came to their

experiences. When it came to the services that DFO provides to the Atlantic salmon community – for example permitting for scientific and research activities, accessing scientific data, and the approval/support for conservation projects – many felt that the processes, timelines, and outcomes, were not supportive of positive outcomes for Atlantic salmon. Overall, participants had many suggestions for DFO on how to do a better job of facilitating conservation actions on the ground, creating avenues to share data, and supporting the conservation needs of Atlantic salmon, as well as the Indigenous peoples, partners and stakeholders that carry out conservation activities. Working between knowledge types (e.g., Western science and Indigenous knowledge) and adopting two-eyed seeing approaches will require amongst other things, ways of sharing data that respect Indigenous peoples as knowledge holders, and ways of communicating that are broadly understood across disciplines (e.g., between Indigenous peoples and western scientists, between technical and non-technical audiences). In the end, moving from considering Indigenous perspectives, to managing based on Indigenous perspectives will require a shift in the Department’s current paradigm.

Improved relationships through enhanced communication, coordination, and collaboration

Above all else, participants need and expect to be a part of the future for Atlantic salmon. Indigenous peoples, partners, and stakeholders alike expressed a desire to see DFO in the places that matter most: on their rivers, in their communities, and at their respective forums for conversation. Many expressed their desire to contribute and to be included in Atlantic salmon conservation. There is a desire to move beyond the current perceived ‘check box’ approach to collaboration (i.e., superficial) to ‘real’ (i.e., meaningful and effective relationships). Many suggestions were received on how to build better, more inclusive relationships, ranging from the fundamental (e.g., respect and communication with partners), to staffing decisions (e.g., hiring knowledgeable staff with the right values, and sending the right staff to meetings), to creating better governance structures and changing corporate culture. Achieving improved relationships will require capacity building, especially amongst Indigenous peoples, who have traditionally been left out of discussions on science and management. When asked how DFO could enhance its communication and coordination with stakeholders, the most important actions that participants included were: having a platform where data is actively shared between DFO and stakeholders (81%); renewing Federal-Provincial agreements that support salmon conservation and management (75%); and having dedicated Atlantic salmon coordinators in each province (72%).

6. Next steps

All of the feedback received through engagement on Atlantic salmon to date will be used to refine the elements and further develop the first complete draft of the Strategy. Once complete, this draft will be made available for comment to Indigenous peoples, Indigenous organizations, partners and stakeholders. It is anticipated that the draft strategy will be available for comment in the coming months, through [Engagement on Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Strategy \(dfo-mpo.gc.ca\)](https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/engagement-on-wild-atlantic-salmon-conservation-strategy). Follow DFO’s social media pages for updates: [\(20+\) Fisheries and Oceans Canada | Facebook](#) / [Fisheries and Oceans \(@FishOceansCAN\) / Twitter](#)