



Evaluation of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS) and Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) Programs



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Final Report

July 23, 2024

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Evaluation context

Overview

In accordance with the Departmental Evaluation Plan, an evaluation of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS) and Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) programs was conducted by Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) Evaluation Division. The evaluation complies with the Treasury Board Policy on Results and meets the obligations of the *Financial Administration Act*.

Evaluation context, scope, and objectives

The evaluation covered the fiscal years 2018-19 to 2022-23. The DFO Grants and Contributions (Gs&Cs) programs included DFO Headquarters and all DFO's regions: Newfoundland and Labrador (N.L.); Maritimes; Gulf; Quebec; Ontario and Prairie (O&P); Arctic and Pacific. The evaluation was designed to provide evidence on where the programs were working well and to identify where improvements could be made. The evaluation questions were determined based on a review of key program documents, results from preliminary discussions with senior management and program staff, and findings from previous evaluation reports. The evaluation included an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the AFS and AAROM programs. Of note, the Indigenous Program Review (IPR), cited throughout the report was included as a secondary source of information.¹

¹ Between May 2017 and May 2019 the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute reviewed the programs at Fisheries and Oceans Canada that support Indigenous involvement in commercial fishing and aquaculture operations and the collaborative management of fisheries, aquatic resources, oceans, and habitat to see what might need to change or be improved. For more see: [National Indigenous Fisheries Institute](#).

Evaluation methodology and evaluation questions

The evaluation was designed to respond to the questions listed below.

Relevance

1. To what extent do AFS and AAROM address identified needs?
2. To what extent do AFS and AAROM align with the priorities of the federal government and the department?

Effectiveness

3. To what extent are AFS and AAROM supporting the achievement of the strategic objectives and actions identified in the Action Plan for the Renewal of Indigenous programming?
4. Based on the Action Plan, how have AFS and AAROM contributed to advancing the co-development, co-design, and co-delivery approach?

Efficiency

5. To what extent do AFS and AAROM have the resources needed to deliver the program as intended?
6. To what extent is AFS and AAROM's management and oversight of G&C's funding efficient?
7. To what extent is AFS and AAROM's performance information used for decision making?
8. To what extent have Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) considerations been integrated in AFS and AAROM?

Information was gathered from multiple lines of evidence and was triangulated to address the evaluation questions. The methodology included a document and file review, 44 interviews including participation from 16 Indigenous program recipients, financial, and data analysis. The evaluation methodology, limitations, and mitigation strategies are presented in Annex A.



Program profiles

The AFS and AAROM programs focus on building capacity and participation of Indigenous Peoples in fisheries and aquatic resource management.

AFS

The AFS was developed in 1992 in response to the 1990 Sparrow Supreme Court decision, to provide a framework for Aboriginal fishing for food, social, and ceremonial (FSC) purposes under the authority of communal licenses issued under the *Fisheries Act*. With the aim to increase participation in the management of fisheries following conservation principles, AFS supports Indigenous organizations to distribute licenses; educate its members on regulations and restrictions, monitor fisheries and catch data; enhance scientific capacity and employment opportunities, and ultimately provide greater autonomy to manage their own affairs and a foundation for the development of self-government and treaties.

AFS supports 130 agreements nationally with more than 200+ Indigenous communities and organizations.

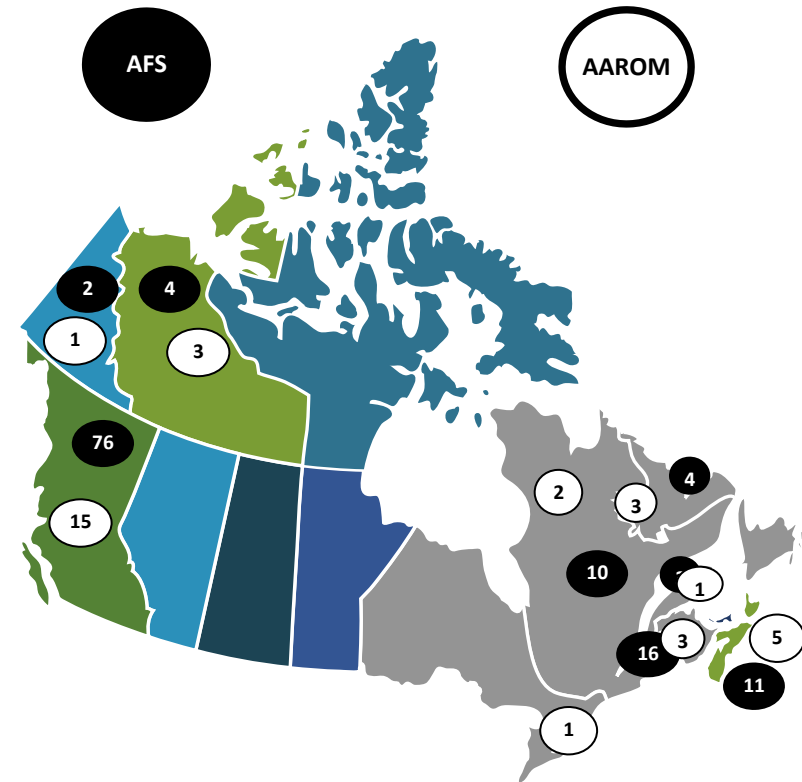
AAROM

The AAROM program was created in 2004 with the goal to further support Indigenous groups to work as aggregate partners (forming AAROM departments), to build technical capacity; undertake scientific research activities in aquatic resources and oceans management; coordinate planning processes along an ecosystem or watershed; and share information and decision-making related to aquatic resources and oceans with Indigenous partners, in collaboration with the department and other stakeholders.

AAROM's national network includes 34 Indigenous-led departments² across Canada that include 30 watershed technical/advisory groups, 2 regional groups (one from each coast) and 2 national groups that work on national issues/policy development.

In addition, AFS and AAROM core funding can serve as a platform for Indigenous Peoples to access other program opportunities within DFO and inter-departmentally.

Figure 1: Co-developed AFS & AAROM sub-regions



² Indigenous-led departments refer to conglomerates of Indigenous organizations with biologists, field technicians, and other expertise who work together on research projects, stock assessments, and other studies to provide information and knowledge to member communities.

Relevance

Alignment with the priorities of the federal government and the department

AFS and AAROM program objectives are aligned with federal and departmental priorities, including DFO's Reconciliation Strategy.

Alignment with federal and departmental priorities

The programs' objectives to empower Indigenous groups in fisheries management, increase capacity-building, and participation in decision-making processes related to aquatic resources and oceans management, align with the federal government's priority to improve the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples (Budget 2019, 2023, Speech from the Throne 2023).

The programs also contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action, #92, to build respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples; sustain their access to jobs, training and education; and advance their Rights as outlined in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) and [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act \(UNDA\)](#).

Similarly, AFS and AAROM objectives align with, and contribute to, achieving DFO's departmental results to **'enhance relationships with, involvement of, and outcomes for Indigenous peoples'** as well as being the foundation of DFO's commitments to Reconciliation that support the implementation of Indigenous and Treaty Rights related to fisheries, oceans, and aquatic habitat. This is reflected in the timeline in Figure 2.

Alignment with DFO's Reconciliation Strategy

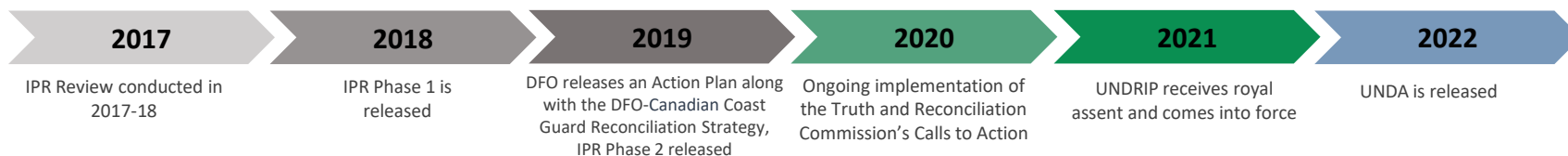
In addition, in support of DFO's national and long-term commitments within the Reconciliation strategy, all regions have Reconciliation Action Plans that focus on advancing co-design, co-development and co-delivery (co-co-co³), supporting capacity building, engaging with Indigenous groups, and supporting more flexible agreements as ways to enhance and strengthen relationships with Indigenous people.

A clear signal of the department's commitment to support the continuous improvement of DFO's Indigenous programming was also the launch of an Indigenous program review (IPR), undertaken by the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute ("The Institute") in 2018 and 2019, which identified some of the evolving needs of Indigenous Peoples. Identified below are the number and themes of the recommendations that emerged from the IPR review:

- 141 Recommendations generated in total
- 77 To enhance or improve program structures and delivery
- 64 To 'Ignite a Culture Change' and reflect the spirit of Reconciliation
- 31 Focused on AFS and Aboriginal Fishery Guardians
- 9 Focused on AAROM

In response to the IPR recommendations, DFO released an Action Plan for the renewal and expansion of DFO's Indigenous programs in 2019. The Action Plan included funding enhancements and six renewal streams.

Figure 2: Timeline



³ A collaborative working arrangement where Indigenous experts and DFO co-design and co-develop program plans and practices that better support the interests of Indigenous peoples and promotes Indigenous co-delivery of program services ([National Indigenous Fisheries Institute](#)).

Relevance

AFS and AAROM address many of the identified needs of Indigenous program recipients

AFS and AAROM are unique DFO programs that address many of the identified needs of Indigenous program recipients. Stable funding, program structures and coordination, were identified as providing Indigenous program recipients the support to build capacity to participate in fisheries and aquatic resources management and fostering a collaborative relationship with DFO.

Program Structures and coordination

AFS and AAROM are addressing many of the needs and priorities of Indigenous program recipients by increasing their capacity to participate in the management and coordination of fisheries and aquatic resources. Also, the programs are valued for their coordination roles in bringing together multiple communities and/or organizations, which creates a network of expertise and knowledge to address community concerns and issues in support of Indigenous Rights and self-governance. A few interviewees stated that these programs provide structured tools and resources to perform activities ‘on the ground’. As well, several internal and external informants noted positive results with DFO’s communication, indicating that communities are more clearly informed about departmental decisions on fisheries and fisheries management.

Other DFO programs that complement AFS and AAROM’s focus on capacity building, skill development, and training for Indigenous Peoples include:

- Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative
- Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative
- Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives
- Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk
- Aquatic Habitat Restoration Fund
- Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative
- Salish Sea Initiative

Funding stability and increasing opportunities

DFO’s release of the Action Plan for the renewal and expansion of DFO’s Indigenous programs is helping respond to the evolving needs of Indigenous Peoples. As a result of the renewal, most Indigenous key informants recognized the importance of having received funding enhancements (see page 9) to their core budgets which have helped address existing historical inequities between recipients, as well as increased operating costs since the programs were first established.

Additionally, the programs not only provide stable funding, but were recognized by many key informants as providing opportunities for additional funding and resources to amplify capacity for certain activities (e.g., monitoring programs), acquiring necessary equipment, generating employment opportunities and retaining staff, improving collaboration, fostering community engagement, and providing a direct relationship and communication with DFO.

Finally, program renewal has also supported Indigenous community capacity by opening the programs to new entrants, continuing its focus on increased technical skills, and establishing collaborative frameworks with tools and resources available to communities. Other changes, such as increasing flexibilities around contribution agreements are also important (and are discussed in more detail throughout the report).



Relevance

Challenges in addressing some of the identified needs

AFS and AAROM face challenges in addressing some of the identified needs for the following reasons: multiple interpretations of what constitutes ‘needs’; AFS’s program design does not always align with recipients’ needs, including the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian component; limited financial resources; training; and staffing, recruitment, and retention.

Varying interpretations of needs

AFS and AAROM are operating in evolving environments with various interpretations of what constitutes ‘needs.’ Internal and external interviewees noted some of the complexities related to meeting the needs of Indigenous communities, especially since these needs were frequently related to the level of existing capacity within these communities. For instance, communities with lower levels of capacity may not have the appropriate staffing resources to pursue additional funding opportunities, or to conduct activities related to the management of aquatic resources that could bolster or sustain their capacity needs. This challenge is discussed in more detail on page 18.

As well, AFS program’s design is not always aligned to the varied needs of some Indigenous organizations. Historical issues impact the fulfillment of FSC fishing with challenges around rights of access, licensing, and allocations. In a few cases, this impacts the delivery of the program with a few groups expressing reluctance to sign AFS agreements, stating that the FSC schedule infringes on their established Rights, and this ultimately impacts their relationship with the department. Along similar lines, a few key informants felt that the AFS program should better reflect the current context, such as Reconciliation. However, it should be noted that the program has recently worked with some agreement holders and used available program flexibilities to address concerns around the inclusion of the FSC schedule.

Other challenges in addressing needs

Additional challenges, mentioned by key informants, were related to some of the roles and expectations with collaborative management. However, it is important to note that some of challenges may also be linked to cross-

cutting departmental IPR recommendations to ‘ignite a culture change’ and are not the sole responsibility of AFS and AAROM to address. For instance, several key informants suggested needing better collaboration based on co-management principles, more control and less oversight (i.e., reporting), and autonomy in decision-making related to resource management.

Similar points were also made in reference to the limited progress on renewal of the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian (AFG) since this role was seen as key to providing communities with the level of authority and profile they are looking for (see pages 19-20).

As well, a few key informants mentioned the need for more legitimate consultations rather than just being ‘informed’ and having advisory roles. However, also noted by most interviewees, limitations in resources and capacity hinder the achievement of these expectations, especially as many of these activities take a considerable amount of time and effort to implement (e.g., establishing relationships).

Finally, the need for more standardized training was also mentioned, including for DFO’s employees to gain more cultural awareness, and for program recipients to be able to continue to increase their technical skills and build on their career paths. Recruitment and retention of staff was also seen as a challenge by both internal and external interviewees that also impacted overall relationship building.

In response to the IPR, DFO’s Action Plan for the Renewal of Indigenous Programming aimed to address some of these gaps and challenges to better meet Indigenous needs. The following pages will demonstrate some of the programs’ main achievements in the last five years.



Effectiveness

As part of the Action Plan, AFS and AAROM were responsible for six renewal streams

The Implementation of DFO's Action Plan, crafted in response to key IPR recommendations, is advancing successfully. In the Action Plan, AFS, AAROM and AFG were implicated in the implementation of six renewal streams. A list of actions items with progress to date and allotted financial resources are provided in Table 1. All items are currently being addressed or are in the process of being implemented across six primary renewal streams. While not inclusive of all the work achieved by the program, the table includes the Resource Management Officer Technicians (RMOT) initiative (see pages 19-20) along with other notable examples of accomplishments, under each stream. As well, the categories are not mutually exclusive. **All streams are discussed in more details in subsequent pages.**

Table 1: Renewal streams for the collaborative programs

RENEWAL STREAMS	Items showing progress being made towards achievement of these objectives	AFS budget	AAROM budget	AFG budget
1 CORE FUNDING	➤ Enhanced funding levels for all existing AFS and AAROM agreements. ➤ Core AFS and AAROM funding as a platform for continuous capacity development.	\$5.8M	\$2M	\$0.3M
2 PROJECT FUNDS	Project Funds for AFS, AAROM and AFG: ➤ Renewed investment in operational infrastructure and capacity development ➤ AAROM Innovation and Collaboration Fund (ICF) ➤ AFS Capacity Support Fund (CSF)	\$2.5M (CSF)	\$2.5M (ICF)	\$0.4M
3 NETWORK ACTIVITIES	To address this objective work was done on supporting network activities: ➤ AAROM Network ➤ National AAROM meetings ➤ AAROM Hub Website	\$0.4M (Also includes streams 4 and 5)	\$0.5M (Also includes streams 4 and 5)	\$0.3M (Also includes streams 4 and 5)
4 ADMINISTRATIVE RENEWAL	Work is beginning on some key goals of the administrative renewal: ➤ Regularized work-planning, timely and reliable advance payments, meaningful performance measurement, co-developed program guidance and improved communications.	See above	See above	See above
5 CO-DESIGN, CO-DEVELOPMENT, CO-DELIVERY (CO-CO-CO)	To address this objective, governance structures were put in place to support the co-co-co ➤ Collaborative Programs Management Committee ➤ National AAROM Steering Committee ➤ Capacity Development Team ➤ Indigenous Training and Skill Development Hub	See above	See above	See above
6 NEW ENTRANTS	To increase participation in the AFS and AAROM programs : ➤ New entrants for the AAROM program ➤ New entrants for the AFS program ➤ New fisheries monitoring and stewardship capacity through the roll-out of the AFS program's Resource Management Officer Technician (RMOT) initiative	\$1.5M	\$1.8M	\$2M (RMOT)

Effectiveness

Increase in AFS and AAROM's core budgets

The increase in AFS and AAROM's core budgets ensured a minimum level of funding for all AFS and AAROM recipients and helped address some historical inequities between AAROM departments. However, internal and external key informants, still perceive program funding as insufficient.

1 CORE FUNDING

Enhancements to existing agreements

The AFS and AAROM program budgets received an increase in their annual funding through Budget 2017 as shown in Table 2. This budget enhancement ensured that all AFS and AAROM recipients had access to a minimum level of funding that was nationally consistent, able to support more meaningful program participation, and address some of the historical funding inequities that had emerged between communities and organizations. Internal and external respondents reported that additional funding from the program renewal enabled additional capacity building and made a difference in the ability for groups and communities to participate in the programs. However, many internal respondents noted that the programs' financial resources remain insufficient, with some DFO staff pointing towards inflation and the rising costs of living as continuous challenges for recipients.

2 PROJECT FUNDS

3 NETWORK ACTIVITIES

4 ADMIN RENEWAL

5 CO-CO-CO

6 NEW ENTRANTS

Table 2: AFS and AAROM budgets pre and post 2017

	PRE-BUDGET 2017	POST BUDGET 2017
AFS	\$27.1M	\$40.4M
AAROM	\$13.1M	\$19.9M

AFS: Prior to Budget 2017, the AFS budget had been stagnant for years. As well, the funding for AFS has historically been uneven across agreement holders. Through the enhancements to existing agreements, AFS recipients, who have struggled over time to build or maintain a minimum level of program participation, received a more robust adjustment to their core funding. This increase supported recipients in moving from uneven to more consistent levels of AFS-related capacity and enabled them to make key investments to deliver on program objectives, such as upgrading their facilities and equipment. Although during interviews DFO staff still highlighted the need for increased funding for this program, more than half of all AFS program recipients are now able to access between \$100k to \$200k per year.

AAROM: As was the case for AFS recipients, priority was given to ensuring all AAROM departments had at least a minimum level of funding, as well as helping offset increased costs that have arisen since AAROM was first established. AAROM's program renewal has also focused on addressing historical inequities between AAROM departments. Different types of AAROM departments have differing needs. As such, a median funding level was established for different department types, which helped determine their enhancement approach. As a result, AAROM recipients with the largest historical gaps in funding were raised to \$415k for watershed or project service providers and \$215k for technical/advisory service providers. In addition, the funding enhancements were also intended to support more equitable funding for core staffing. As noted later in the report, limited staff is a challenge to effective program delivery (see page 18 on Resources).

Effectiveness

Leveraging AFS and AAROM's core funding as a 'platform' (1 of 2)

AFS and AAROM support program recipients leverage their core funding as a 'platform' to seek out other opportunities (e.g., accessing other funding sources, developing partnerships, and increasing collaborative initiatives).

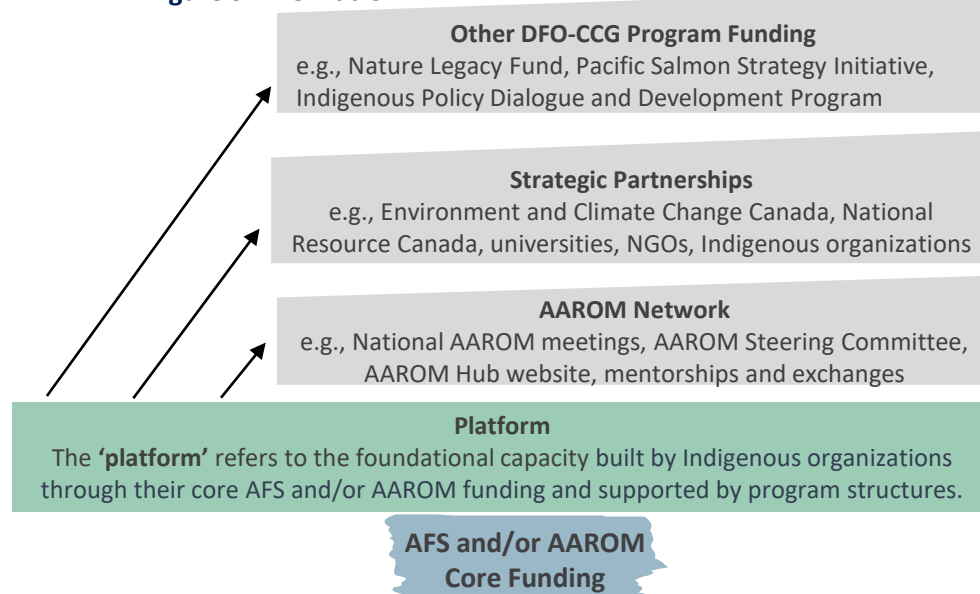
The AFS and AAROM Platform

Although they received funding enhancements from Budget 2017, the AFS and AAROM programs are unable to meet all financial needs of Indigenous recipients. To this end, the programs support recipients in leveraging their core capacity to access other available funding, as well as entering strategic partnerships that contribute towards their diverse goals and priorities [i.e., to use the AFS and AAROM as a platform (Figure 3)]. As such, increasing access to funding from a variety of sources can help groups develop greater organizational capacity and resiliency, as well as increase opportunities for partnerships and collaborations. The following section describes the use of AFS and AAROM as a platform.

- The programs' **core funding** provides Indigenous Peoples with salary for key staff that support activities towards program objectives. In this context, the **'platform'** refers to the foundational capacity achieved by Indigenous organizations through this core funding and supported by program structures including the Capacity Development Team (CDT), the Indigenous Training and Skills Development Hub (ITSD), and AFS and AAROM Project Funds.
- The platform can support the growth of the **AAROM network** by providing Indigenous groups access to various partners for key projects or initiatives. The network's goal is to increase collaboration and knowledge sharing between and amongst network members and other project partners.

- The platform can also be leveraged by Indigenous Peoples to seek out other program opportunities through **strategic partnerships** (e.g., with other federal departments, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that increase the resource base and advance shared resource management objectives.
- Finally, internally, the platform provides a mechanism through which **other DFO and Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) programs** may direct their funding via existing AFS or AAROM agreements, which are amended by program staff to include these additional program activities.

Figure 3: The Platform



Effectiveness

Leveraging AFS and AAROM's core funding as a 'platform' (2 of 2)

The AFS and AAROM Platform continued

The platform provides access to other funding which supports Indigenous capacity building by providing opportunities to pursue further activities that may align with Indigenous groups' priorities relating to fisheries management, aquatic habitat, marine and spatial planning, species at risk, and science—to name a few. Half of the Indigenous recipients engaged during this evaluation said they had used either the AFS or AAROM programs to leverage other funding. In fact, one key informant shared how the programs provide the experience and knowledge to support applications for other funding sources, and another said that AAROM provides a necessary financial platform for the group to seek out other opportunities.

To note, one of the key IPR recommendations is to maximize departmental and other federal government collaborations to promote access to other funding and support capacity building. In a survey administered to DFO staff to determine internal awareness of AAROM as a platform, a few respondents felt there was a need for greater awareness and clarity within DFO regarding this platform as a mechanism. It was also suggested that the programs provide simpler and more information to program managers to improve its use. Greater synergy between departmental sectors may benefit the department as a whole if the latter increases its understanding of how to access the larger AFS and/or AAROM program network, and how it can be used to advance the departmental Reconciliation Strategy. However, with an increased use of the platform, it is essential to allocate a suitable level of resources accordingly.

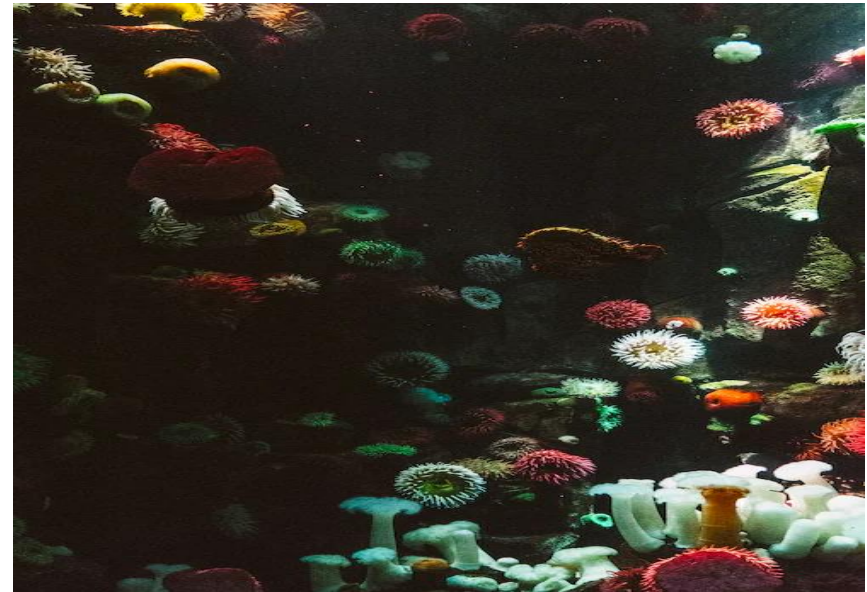


Photo credit: Scott Webb via Unsplash

GBA PLUS GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS PLUS

AFS and AAROM's program funding can also be considered as a platform to support recipients' abilities to collect and manage Indigenous Knowledge (IK). For example, AAROM funding has supported Elder working groups that help inform decisions within a community. It has also supported intergenerational knowledge transfer through ICF projects for youth. Moving forward, the 3rd National AAROM meeting recommended that DFO and AAROM departments continue to discuss best practices to support the governance and sharing of IK within communities.

Effectiveness

Accessing additional project funds contributed to building capacity

AFS and AAROM project funds have supported Indigenous program recipients to build capacity.

AFS and AAROM Project Funds

Through the renewal streams, AFS and AAROM, received funding for additional project funds, which were well received by recipients. Table 3 describes the three projects' funds and demonstrates how they have contributed to building capacity for recipients.

Table 3: AFS and AAROM Project funds

Project Funds	Status	Examples of how it helps build capacity	Results to date
Operational infrastructure and Capacity Development Fund	Completed	This short-term fund (2019-20, 2020-21) represented early investment of renewed program contributions in the capital assets, equipment and infrastructure needed by participating Indigenous communities and organizations to deliver on their fisheries management objectives.	➤ Renewal of assets and equipment ➤ \$14.85M in funding delivered to 29 eligible AFS and AAROM program participants through 2019-20 and 2020-21.
AAROM Innovation and Collaboration Fund	Ongoing	This fund provided annual support for projects and activities to broaden capacity and networking relationships. ➤ Operational Infrastructure- to grow assets and equipment ➤ Communications & Governance – supports community engagement ➤ Regional Research, Planning & Coordination – tools and solutions to address regional issues ➤ Develop New Services & Partnerships ➤ Indigenous Knowledge – support the use of IK ➤ Engaging Youth – supports the development of strategies and tools for outreach, training, employment, Youth-Elder interactions, etc.	➤ 2020-21: 14 AAROM departments received this fund. ➤ 2021-22: 23 AAROM departments received this fund. ➤ 2022-23: 23 AAROM departments received this fund. ➤ \$4.9M in funding delivered to the AAROM departments since 2020-21.
Annual Capacity Support Fund	Ongoing	This annual and recurring fund supports one-year investments in asset renewal, organizational and technical capacity building, and the development of collaborative relationships. ➤ Renewal of assets, equipment, property upgrades ➤ Field surveys, monitoring or assessments ➤ Development of strategies and tools to support ongoing community outreach related to AFS program delivery, including involving youth and Elders ➤ Training and professional development activities	➤ Has supported the construction of new infrastructure (e.g., in support of a community's First Nation Guardian program) and acquisition of new technology for stock assessment work. ➤ \$11.6M in additional contributions delivered to AFS program recipients since 2021-22.

1
CORE
FUNDING

2
PROJECT
FUNDS

3
NETWORK
ACTIVITIES

4
ADMIN
RENEWAL

5
CO-CO-CO

6
NEW
ENTRANTS

Effectiveness

AFS and AAROM Network Activities

AFS and AAROM network activities support recipients' capacity building, particularly in developing collaborative capacity (e.g., share resources, tools) and information sharing.

Network Activities

Network activities⁴ support recipients to collaborate, share resources and tools, and promote new ideas and projects. They also raise the awareness and promote the services of Indigenous partners. Some examples of network activities include:

1
CORE
FUNDING

2
PROJECT
FUNDS

3
NETWORK
ACTIVITIES

4
ADMIN
RENEWAL

5
CO-CO-CO

6
NEW
ENTRANTS

AAROM Hub Website

Launched in 2020, it provides a resource for AAROM departments to learn about one another, their initiatives, and potential partners.

AAROM Steering Committee

A joint Indigenous-DFO committee that co-designs, co-develops, and co-delivers the National AAROM Meetings and reflects regional priorities and perspectives.

Joint Capacity Assessment Working Groups

Recommended by AAROM Directors, this working group focuses on capacity development, including the development of tools to measure capacity building.

National AAROM Meetings

Brings together executives from AAROM departments with DFO staff to share information, discuss challenges faced by AAROM departments and collaborate on initiatives.

Other network activities and related areas in various stages of implementation include:

- **The Capacity Development Team:** contributes to increased networking and collaboration between recipients
- **Communication and Collaboration Strategy:** provides information to recipients about funding opportunities
- **The Marketing and Partnership Toolkit:** promotes program recipients as key service providers
- **Mentorships:** to share experiences and expertise; to leverage shared knowledge

The **Indigenous Training and Skills Development Hub⁵**, led by the Indigenous Affairs Directorate Secretariat, in collaboration with the Institute and Indigenous Service Canada's Strategic Partnership Initiative, supports the AFS and AAROM platform, and supports Indigenous community training and skills development. This initiative also encourages sharing across Indigenous collaborative programs and commercial programs, as well as between federal departments.

⁴ See also Figure 4 on page 15

⁵ For more information, please see: www.itsdhub.ca

Effectiveness

Administrative renewal for continuous improvements

An administrative renewal is currently underway to improve processes including multi-year contribution agreements, streamlining reporting requirements and approvals, and improving data management.

Continuous improvements on administrative processes

1
CORE
FUNDING

2
PROJECT
FUNDS

3
NETWORK
ACTIVITIES

4
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An administrative renewal process is currently underway to address some of the ongoing challenges with existing administrative processes, including the standardization and streamlining of these processes and aligning performance metrics to Indigenous definitions of success (see page 21). Administrative processes under review include but are not limited to agreement reporting, the Grants and Contributions Agreement Tracking System, payments, and performance measurement. During the evaluation, internal and external interviewees highlighted a few areas where improvements could continue to be made. These are outlined below.

➤ Increasing multi-year agreements

A few Indigenous key informants felt that multi-year agreements allow for more predictability, planning, core staffing, and a better track record on delivering on activities. These longer agreements allow communities to offer more stable positions, hire consistent staff, develop relationships with DFO, and pursue other funding sources, without the strain of year-to-year applications. It should be noted that internal efforts are being made towards increasing multi-year agreements for both programs.

➤ Reducing reporting requirements and levels of approval/ increasing consistency across regions

A few Indigenous recipients perceived the programs' newer application templates and reporting requirements as an improvement, as they are clearer, simpler, more consistent and flexible. However, reporting was still raised as a general issue, with a few internal staff and Indigenous key informants wondering about the value of data collected. In their views, DFO could learn from other departments regarding Gs&Cs' reporting flexibilities. The requirements also seem to vary across regions, according to the program officers processing the paperwork. Finally, a few DFO interviewees questioned about the necessity of having to go through NHQ to get approval, particularly in the case of amendments to existing agreements.

➤ Improving data management

The Grants and Contributions Agreement Tracking System (GCATS) is a national information system that helps DFO and CCG employees administer and manage transfer payment programs within the department. Given the last evaluation focused on the data management system, this evaluation did not analyze GCATS to the same extent. However, a few DFO staff raised the GCATS as a challenge for data management. Inconsistent data entry, system lagging, and unreliable information were raised as issues with the system, as well as the sheer number of agreements needing to be processed while ensuring that staff are properly trained on the tools to process the agreements.

➤ Other suggested areas for improvement included:

- Continuing to explore flexibilities for agreements;
- Providing more support on filling out applications and templates to communities; and
- Greater clarity of the expectations (e.g., with reporting) at the outset of the contribution agreement.

Effectiveness

The implementation of the co-design, co-development and co-delivery approach

The program has advanced the implementation of the co-design, co-development, and co-delivery approach. Establishing governance structures were seen as key to its successful application.

1 CORE FUNDING

2 PROJECT FUNDS

3 NETWORK ACTIVITIES

4 ADMIN RENEWAL

5 CO-CO-CO

6 NEW ENTRANTS

The co-design, co-development and co-delivery approach

The co-design, co-development and co-delivery (co-co-co) approach is a collaborative approach between DFO and Indigenous Peoples. It involves working jointly with Indigenous groups to seek their input so that they can influence program design, the direction of a program, and the management and delivery of a program to meet their needs based on joint decision-making. DFO's 2020-21 [Evaluation of the Indigenous Commercial Fisheries Programs](#) provides a detailed graphic of co-co-co. As mentioned earlier, the IPR made several recommendations and, in response, DFO's Action Plan also focused on adapting some of the internal processes and mechanisms in support of a co-co-co approach.

From the document review and interviews, evidence suggests that DFO has made some significant progress on these commitments, especially with the implementation of collaborative initiatives at the national program level, such as the National AAROM meeting and Steering Committee. Less progress has been noted at the operational level and with AFS initiatives.

Overall, however, considerable efforts have been placed on defining processes and developing mechanisms and governance structures for facilitating the co-co-co approach between DFO and Indigenous Peoples (Figure 4). Internal and external interviewees perceived these governance structures as key examples of the co-co-co approach in action.

Figure 4: Key structures for the collaborative programs

Collaborative Programs Management Committee (CPMC)

A committee comprised of DFO and Indigenous executives which is responsible for overseeing program renewal and the ongoing delivery of Indigenous collaborative programs.

Capacity Development Team (CDT)

The CDT is an Indigenous-led team that will be working to build capacity for participants of the collaborative programs within the context of the Capacity Assessment and Development Framework. Its aim is to support meaningful employment and career progression.

AAROM Steering Committee

Forum for co-design and co-delivery of the annual National AAROM Meeting comprised of Indigenous AAROM executives and DFO managers and program staff.

The National AAROM Meeting

An annual meeting that helps enhance the AAROM network across Canada by bringing together AAROM department executives with DFO managers and staff. It also aims to drive innovation and identify shared solutions.

Indigenous Training and Skills Development Hub Working Group

This working group includes representatives from DFO, the Institute, and other federal departments, and aims to establish standard training for career paths within the AAROM program, and to coordinate all training being implemented.

Effectiveness

Ongoing efforts are needed to fully implement the co-design, co-development and co-delivery approach

Ongoing efforts are needed to fully implement the co-design, co-development and co-delivery at all program levels, including in the regions.

What we heard about co-co-co

Both internal and external interviewees highlighted the importance of good relationships between DFO and Indigenous partners to facilitate the advancement of co-co-co. Building trust and the continuity of DFO staff in their positions were seen as important for the ongoing success of the collaborative approach, in addition to the governance structures mentioned on the previous page. However, all interviewees who referenced this, also qualified that having these structures does not mean that co-co-co is being implemented. A few regions mentioned that the co-co-co approach seems to be evolving differently depending on the region. Yet although they may not officially call it 'co-co-co', regional program officers are already working collaboratively with Indigenous partners. As evidence from interviews and document review suggests, collaborative planning is happening at a national level which is intended to lead to implementation of the co-co-co approach in the regions in the years to come. The Resource Management Officer Technician is a good example of co-development between the Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) and the CPMC as a career path forward and as an interim solution to the AFG's limited progress on renewal (see pages 19 and 20).

True co-co-co

Half of the external interviewees were less certain about the progress and said they saw no difference in how they interact with DFO with the co-co-co. External interviewees also shared a desire for true co-management of the resources which they did not believe was currently happening.

GBA PLUS

GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS PLUS

Mandatory training for Indigenous cultural competency was raised by a few DFO interviewees as something that would be helpful in building strong relationships with Indigenous partners. It was also noted by a few DFO staff members that it is important to have Indigenous public servants working in these programs to add perspective and contribute to that relationship building. A few key informants indicated that the development of a community of practice for the training, retention, and succession of staff who are skilled at building relationships with, and providing support to Indigenous groups, was being considered for the program.

One way to describe what is meant by 'true co-co-co' is by using a cake analogy. Historically, recipients may have been offered programs that were fully scoped out in terms of design and implementation (i.e. "pre-baked cakes").

Presently, AFS and AAROM are prioritizing and applying a collaborative approach with Indigenous partners (i.e., to bake the cake together) but there is still work to be done. There appears to be limited opportunity for Indigenous groups to provide early input (e.g., is a cake needed in the first place or is a muffin preferred?), as well as have a say in how the resources are managed (i.e., how should we serve the cake?).

Effectiveness

Remaining gaps still need to be addressed to implement the Action Plan

The AAROM program has progressed on the Action Plan's new entrants renewal stream. However, AFS' new entrants renewal stream, and other remaining gaps, still need to be addressed in DFO's Action Plan.

1 CORE FUNDING

2 PROJECT FUNDS

3 NETWORK ACTIVITIES

4 ADMIN RENEWAL

5 CO-CO-CO

6 NEW ENTRANTS

While there has been some notable progress in delivering the items in the Action Plan, there are some remaining gaps. Figure 5 shows some of the initiatives that have been delayed or have moved at a slower pace but are currently underway.

New entrants

The new entrants renewal stream, currently being implemented, is aimed at developing a national approach to establish new AAROM departments and/or AFS communities to cover any existing gaps at the watershed level or community level. While there has been three new entrants for the AAROM program in the last five years, the attention is now being placed on AFS's new entrants renewal stream, where one new entrant has been added to date. This remains a gap in DFO's Action Plan, however, work is underway to address it.

Additional gaps

Information about how well the Action Plan is being carried out is not always shared consistently with the regions nor with external partners. While newsletters and briefings through meetings are provided, there seems to be a clearer understanding of the Action Plan's progress at the national level, whereas external partners or regional staff do not always seem to be as well informed, despite observing changes within the programs in the last years.

It is possible that internal challenges (e.g., staffing), may have impacted the delivery of some of these activities, additional factors also mentioned as hindering progress were:

Figure 5: Delayed elements of the Action Plan

AFS new entrants	A national approach is under development, one new entrant has been added to the AFS program so far. More entrants are expected in late 2024-2025.
AFG program renewal	Limited progress has been made towards the renewal of the AFG program (pages 19-20).
Administrative program renewal	Aimed at addressing administrative improvements within the programs and coordinating the collaborative programs efficiently (page 14).
Updating performance metrics	Aimed at linking performance metrics to Indigenous success factors. Current performance metrics do not take into consideration Indigenous metrics of success (page 21).

- The Covid-19 pandemic affected every aspect of society, including the workplace causing many delays;
- Complexities with meeting the needs and expectations of program recipients, which are not uniform across the country;
- Internal and external capacity;
- Cross cutting pieces that go beyond the AFS and AAROM programs and are related to departmental policies, legislations, and frameworks to advance reconciliation commitments and ignite a culture of change;
- Recommendations that are cross-cutting and require other sectors' involvement; and
- Challenges with having a decentralized model for program delivery.

Efficiency: Program Design

Limited resources and staffing impact program delivery

Limited internal and external resources are one of the key challenges impacting the delivery of the program.

External considerations

- Staffing was noted as a challenge for program recipients, with some communities only able to hire seasonal staff or part-time workers.
- The lack of long-term employment impacts capacity within these communities that must contend with high turnover and continuously training new staff.
- AFS and AAROM recipients with lower capacity (including less time and resources), may benefit from greater support (e.g., with filling out applications), improved communication with DFO (e.g., better understanding of requirements and expectations from the outset, including timelines), and more awareness on how to leverage the program platform to access the different funding sources available through DFO.

Limited
resources

Internal considerations

- Staff turnover, challenges with recruitment and retention, and lack of administrative and communication support, were a few of the barriers mentioned regarding effective program delivery.
- Insufficient resources based on the required workload places increased pressures on existing staff, including additional work such as processing other programs' Gs&Cs.
- Only some respondents of the survey, who had used AAROM to flow other program funding through an existing AAROM agreement, had supplied FTEs⁶ as part of the process.

55%

Of internal informants
mentioned insufficient staff
as a resource challenge

Program
Workload

FTEs



Looking forward

- AAROM funding enhancements have helped address some of these challenges, as their primary goal has been to ensure equitable funding for core staffing and operations and they have been an important step towards helping some communities increase their capacity to plan, strategize, and apply for other funding.
- As part of its mandate, the Capacity Development Team will help communities identify various funding opportunities to support individualized capacity development and community objectives.
- In cases where other DFO programs will need to direct funds to Indigenous Peoples using this platform, it will be important to increase internal capacity for long-term sustainability.

⁶ Full-time equivalents; i.e., number of full-time or part-time employees.

Efficiency: Program Design

Limited progress on the renewal of the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian, represents a gap in the implementation of the Action Plan

Despite IPR commitments and responsibilities related to AFG, including the published Action Plan for the UNDA, there has been limited progress on renewing the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian component of AFS. A Resources Management Officer Technician initiative was implemented through AFS; however, it was not designed to replace the AFG, which has created a gap with the implementation of the Action Plan.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardians

Aboriginal Fishery Guardians (AFG) have been funded since 1992 as a component of the AFS program. It is intended for Indigenous Peoples to have fishery guardians from their respective communities conducting specific monitoring, enforcement and engagement activities. Conservation and Protection is overseeing the designation of guardians and the associated required training. In some instances, DFO's fishery officers and Indigenous fishery guardians may have opportunities to work collaboratively on patrols and training. However, as of now, there is no established program structures or supports in place to ensure the consistency of the AFG as a DFO enforcement program, across the regions, whether it relates to training, equipment, uniform, or officer designation.

Renewal of the AFG

The IPR review recommended the renewal of the AFG, and key recommendations were included that related to the overall program design including to separate the AFG program from AFS. Despite commitments made in the DFO Action Plan, there has been limited progress on renewal and the Institute's most recent Implementation Scorecard, used to measure progress on implementation, gives no score to this item and a status of 'Failure to launch'.

Evidence gathered in the evaluation pointed to internal challenges hindering the renewal of the AFG.

- Lack of clear guidance, direction, and governance on what vision there is for AFG by the department. For example, current inconsistencies exist in how regions are designating guardians.

- Lack of clarity with respect to roles and responsibilities for the AFG.
- Lack of internal personnel and funding dedicated to addressing the AFG renewal. For example, presently there are no dedicated FTEs to the renewal.
- Building a program that must answer to a wide range of differing needs/expectations in different communities.

Importance of advancing the AFG renewal

Internally and externally, evidence shows that there is a strong interest in having designated Aboriginal Fishery Guardians and that there is a need to resolve this gap. In its 2021-2022 IPR scorecard, the Institute expressed that the AFG is a critical element in the development and maintenance of a respectful relationship between Indigenous Peoples and DFO. A few respondents also perceived the inability to move the AFG renewal forward as hindering relationships with Indigenous People.

In addition, the Department of Justice Canada published the Action Plan for the UNDA (2023). Under Lands, territories and resources, article 39 states:

- Develop and implement legislative, policy, or program supports, as well as provide predictable and flexible funding, to ensure fisheries guardians can meet community needs.
(*Fisheries and Oceans Canada*)



Efficiency: Program Design

The Resource Management Officer Technicians as an interim solution

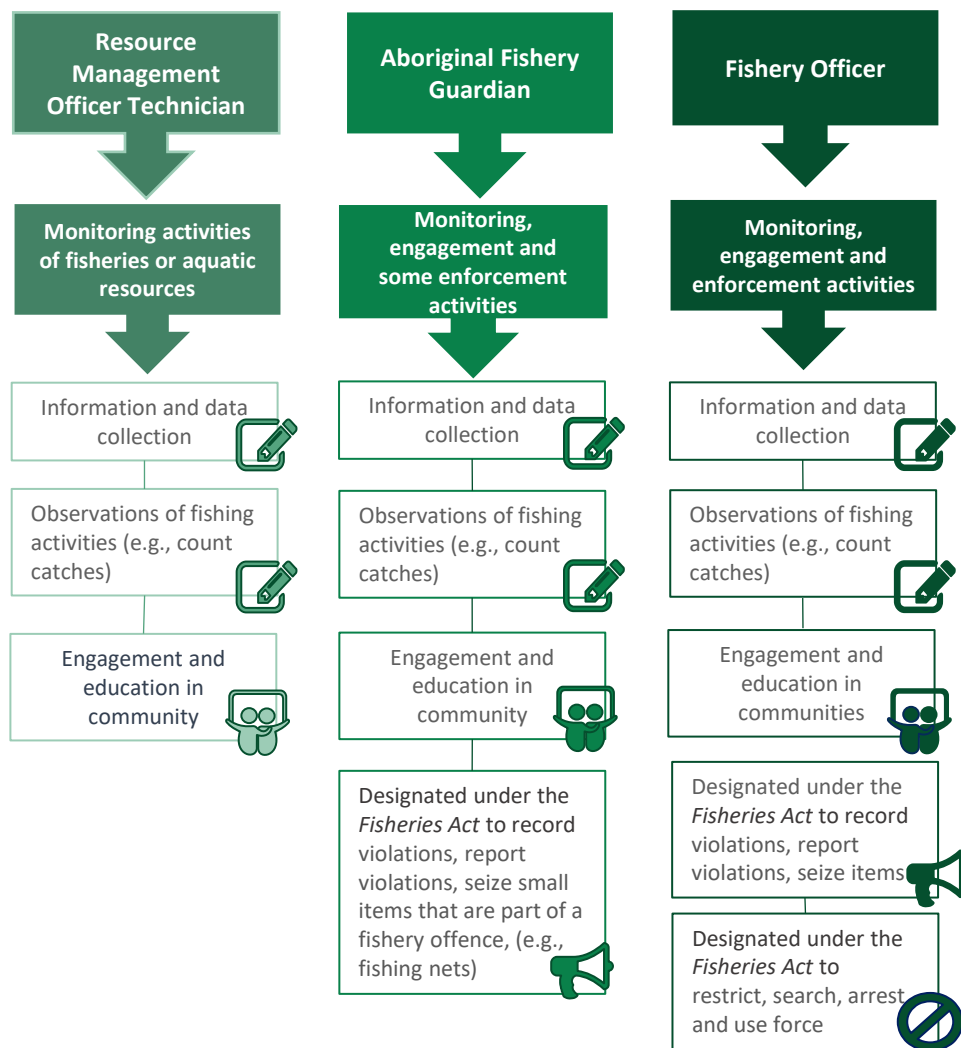
Resource Management Officer Technician

The IAD, through the AFS and the Collaborative Programs Management Committee (CPMC), co-developed the Resource Management Officer Technician (RMOT) initiative to respond to the IPR in efforts to enhance community-based monitoring capacity and enable activities to proceed where the AFG was not in place. As of March 2023, there were 115 RMOT positions* filled across the country by Indigenous Peoples. The RMOT aims to enhance and strengthen monitoring skills. The initiative was designed to be a steppingstone in a career pathway for technicians to eventually become guardians. As well, key informants mentioned the value of the RMOT position in answering some communities needs. However, it does not replace the roles and responsibilities allotted to AFGs who are designated under the *Fisheries Act* and have enforcement powers (Figure 6).

In addition, while RMOT is an interim solution for employing Indigenous Peoples in the monitoring of fisheries and/or aquatics resources, it still does not address the IPR recommendation on the AFG renewal, nor does it satisfy the performance indicator for the number of new trained and employed aboriginal fishery guardians. The RMOT structure is ultimately not sufficient to meet the needs of all communities as it is perceived to limit the upward mobility, since it excludes the enforcement component.

*Note that RMOT positions are not included in the indicator “# of jobs supported annually under collaborative fisheries and watershed-level management agreements” reported in the program performance profile data of the programs (see page 21).

Figure 6: Activities conducted by RMOTs, AFGs and Fishery Officers



Efficiency

Strengthening the validity and reliability of the programs' data (1 of 2)

Performance information for the AFS and AAROM programs indicates that they are meeting most of their targets. There are opportunities however to further improve the quality and relevance of the indicators, particularly with the integration of Indigenous measures of success into program outcomes. Strengthening the validity and reliability of the programs' data could further support strategic decision-making by senior management.

Measuring the success of the AFS & AAROM program

The programs' Performance Information Profiles indicate that the majority of targets are being met (Table 4). These indicators are not specific to AFS and AAROM programs as they include the Indigenous Commercial Fisheries program performance information, making it challenging to adequately assess programs outcomes.

Four indicators 'exceeded' their targets, two indicators are on 'on track' or have 'met' their targets; one indicator is 'off track' while another one is 'unable to be assessed'. Despite the lack of quantifiable progress, qualitative evidence suggests that Indigenous Peoples are building capacity and enhancing their collaborative management capabilities. This disparity highlights the need to re-evaluate the effectiveness of current indicators in capturing more accurately the progress towards program outcomes. A quarter of internal interviewees raised concerns about the quality of the performance information being collected, while a couple suggested reviewing and co-developing the indicators to meet Indigenous definitions of success. This may be one way to ensure performance information is more accurately and reliably representing programs achievements to inform decision-makers.

* Source: DFO-CCG Performance Information Profiles (August 2023)

** For many of these indicators, the established targets are for 2027 and 2037 and, therefore, represent a multi-year effort by the programs. The status of the indicator takes this into account. 'Off track' indicates that the actual result is not trending towards meeting targets, 'On track' indicates that the results are trending towards meeting targets, 'Met' indicates that the result has achieved its target, and 'Exceeded' indicates that the target has been surpassed.

*** Due to insufficient data and a lack of definition of "jobs"

**** Due to the limited progress on renewing AFG

***** This indicator includes data from the collaborative programs and the commercial fisheries programs.

Table 4: How AFS and AAROM achieve results

Performance Indicators*	Off track, On track, Met, Exceeded**
# of eligible Indigenous communities represented by collaborative fisheries management agreements and watershed-level management bodies (AFS)	On Track ✓
# of eligible Indigenous communities represented by collaborative fisheries management agreements and watershed-level management bodies (AAROM)	Met ✓
# of jobs supported annually under collaborative fisheries and watershed-level management agreements	Unable to assess*** ⚠
# of new trained and employed Aboriginal Fishery Guardians	Off Track**** ✗
# of Indigenous people employed in commercial and collaborative management activities *****	Exceeded ✓
# of agreements / arrangements involving Indigenous groups *****	Exceeded ✓
# of Indigenous people trained through agreements / arrangements *****	Exceeded ✓
# of Indigenous people employed through agreements / arrangements *****	Exceeded ✓

Efficiency

Strengthening the validity and reliability of the programs' data (2 of 2)

Financial information for both AFS and AAROM suggests that funding for contribution agreements is disbursed in a timely manner. However, tracking this information and the consistency of its management across regions could be improved (e.g., tracking salaried positions, separating other program funding from the core budget spending).

As mentioned, both programs received enhancements because of Budget 2017, and Tables 5 and 6 show this steady increase to the programs' annual budgets between fiscal years 2018-19 to 2022-23. Based on program data, it seems that funding for contribution agreements is generally disbursed in a timely manner, and the program confirmed that for both AFS and AAROM, all funding is allocated at the end of each fiscal year.

Conversely, it was challenging to determine the total number of actual FTEs for the programs since the data available only included actual FTEs at NHQ and not those in the regions.

Program representatives noted the difficulty, highlighting the fact that due to the nature of these programs (i.e., as Gs&Cs) DFO staff from other programs (e.g., Resource Management) can also be tasked with AFS and AAROM program delivery. As such, the total number of actual FTEs who work on AFS and AAROM may not be accurately reflected in the dedicated program budgets. As well, once funds are transferred out to the regions, the latter become responsible for spending and tracking those funds, and this information was unavailable to the evaluation team during data collection. Hence, improved tracking and management of financial information may be helpful to the program, especially given that limited staffing resources was raised as an issue for efficient program delivery.

Given that AFS and AAROM are used as a platform to leverage other program funding (i.e., amended to include other program activities and G&Cs funds), the appearance of higher expenditures for AFS in the Pacific region for FYs 2018-19, 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 is likely a result of initiatives that leveraged the AFS platform to flow their funding (e.g., the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative). This is also the same for the AAROM program exceeding allocated financial resources. Unfortunately, the breakdown of core versus other program funding was unavailable with the data provided.

Tables 5 and 6: AFS and AAROM FTEs and G&Cs budgets and expenditures between 2018-19 and 2022-23

AFS	FTEs budgeted	FTEs Actual *NHQ ONLY	Gs&Cs budget	Gs&Cs expenditures
2018-19	38	6	\$28.9M	\$41.8M
2019-20	38.5	6	\$31.5M	\$47.4M
2020-21	38.5	6	\$36.6M	\$49.7M
2021-22	38.5	6	\$40.4M	\$35.7M
2022-23	38.5	6	\$40.4M	\$44.6M

AAROM	FTEs budgeted	FTEs Actual *NHQ ONLY	Gs&Cs budget	Gs&Cs expenditures
2018-19	18.4	5	\$15.6M	\$23M
2019-20	22.4	5	\$16.9M	\$25.9M
2020-21	22.4	5	\$19.6M	\$29M
2021-22	22.4	5	\$19.9M	\$24.8M
2022-23	22.4	5	\$19.9M	\$31M

Source: Chief Financial Office and Program data.

Recommendations (1 of 2)

Based on the evaluation findings, four recommendations are suggested for continuous program improvement.

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, co-design, co-develop, and co-deliver a framework to support the full implementation of an Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program within the department. This will require the collaboration between Conservation and Protection and the Indigenous Affairs Directorate.

Rationale:

Despite the IPR recommendations (including implementing AFG as a ‘stand-alone’ program), alongside the commitments in DFO’s Action Plan for the renewal of the AFG program, ongoing Reconciliation efforts and the recently published Action Plan for the UNDA (referenced on page 19) progress on the renewal of the AFG component (of the AFS) has been limited. The RMOT has proven to be a successful interim practice, however there is still a critical gap in meeting Indigenous community needs which could hinder relationships with Indigenous Peoples. However, for the renewal of the AFG to be realized, continued collaboration between Conservation and Protection and the Indigenous Affairs Directorate is essential and should reflect their respective roles and authorities for implementation. The utilization of the co-development, co-design and co-delivery approach will ensure diverse perspectives are considered throughout the process.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, strengthen communication, orientation and coordination regarding the co-design, co-development and co-delivery (co-co-co) approach for the AFS and AAROM programs and ensure that national headquarters, other sectors and regions, use the co-co-co approach in the delivery of programming, while tailoring it to the Indigenous community needs.

Rationale:

The commitments made as part of the [*Action Plan for Renewal and Expansion of DFO’s Indigenous Programs*](#) (the Action Plan) have led to improvements for the co-design, co-development and co-delivery approach for the AFS and AAROM programs, such as defining processes and developing mechanisms and governance structures. However, there were gaps identified (e.g., inconsistent regional application, training for Indigenous cultural competency), particularly at the operational level. DFO’s current commitments in the Action Plan do not address these gaps. Additional efforts and practices are required to ensure proper orientation of all program staff and regions regarding co-co-co and its effective communication and adoption, internally as well as with and between Indigenous partners. Greater communication and coordination between national headquarters and regional offices will promote a more holistic approach, ensuring consistency of application across sectors and regions with Indigenous partners, while tailoring initiatives to meet specific Indigenous community needs.



Photo credit: Sterling Lanier

Recommendations (2 of 2)

Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, review and update AFS and AAROM performance measurements to reflect Indigenous definitions of success as the groundwork to inform and support a future departmental undertaking to update performance measurement in the Aboriginal Programs and Treaties (APT) performance information profile (PIP) for greater accountability and better strategic decision-making.

Rationale:

While AFS and AAROM collect and report on performance data, there is a need to reassess the quality, relevance, and meaningfulness of the data being collected. The evaluation found that the performance information that is used for AFS and AAROM programs does not adequately include meaningful performance measurements (including definitions) that provide information to demonstrate the achievement of results and management of the programs.

Within the timeframe of the Management Action Plan, working with Indigenous partners to align program objectives and performance measurements to reflect Indigenous-desired outcomes will inform and support a future departmental process to review Indigenous-related performance measurements in the PIP for the APT. Aligning AFS and AAROM performance measurements to Indigenous definitions of success is in line with the Indigenous Program Review's recommendations, and will allow for a more accurate understanding of the programs' ability to achieve its results, particularly within the context of Reconciliation and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* Action Plan.

Recommendation 4:

In further support of effective program planning and implementation, it is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, strengthen tools and methods for the collection and use of financial and resource information related to staffing and program management.

Rationale:

The evaluation found that funding is generally disbursed in a timely manner. However, since AFS and AAROM are used as 'platforms' to flow funding to other Indigenous initiatives within the department, it was challenging to clearly distinguish expenditures allocated to AFS and AAROM versus those for other initiatives as well as accounting for the number of actual FTEs dedicated to these programs. Enhanced tracking and management of financial information will be beneficial for the program, addressing concerns about limited staffing resources and improving overall efficiency in program delivery.

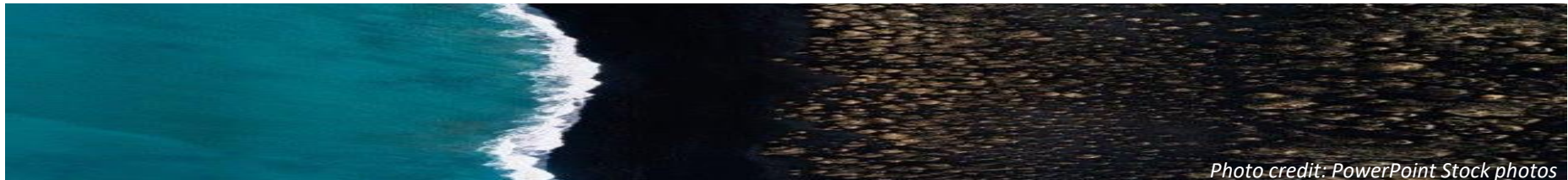


Photo credit: PowerPoint Stock photos

Annex A: Methodology, limitations and mitigation strategies (1 of 2)

The evaluation used multiple lines of evidence, and data is triangulated to mitigate, where possible, any methodological challenges and limitations. This approach was taken to establish the reliability and validity of key findings, and to ensure that conclusions were based on unbiased and documented evidence.



Key Informant Interviews

The evaluation conducted a total of 44 interviews which consisted of 28 DFO interviewees and 16 Indigenous program recipients who receive funding from AFS and AAROM. Employees from all DFO regions participated in the internal interviews. The feedback gathered externally were from groups that volunteered to participate in the evaluation.

Included in these interviewees, are discussions held during site visits to Atlantic and Gulf regions to gather perspectives from Indigenous program recipients on both programs. These site visits helped to gather evidence for the evaluation but also to understand the context of both programs.

Limitations and mitigation

The external discussions with indigenous were voluntary based so the evaluation team triangulated with other lines of evidence such as with documents and administrative information.



Administrative and financial data

The evaluation team conducted a review of administrative, performance, and financial data for both AFS and AAROM. This review included information from the Performance Information Profiles (PIPs) and grants and contributions agreement tracking system (GCATS). Financial information for both programs were extracted from SAP.

Limitations and mitigation

GCATS is not consistently used between regions, therefore the information from GCATS was triangulated with other lines of evidence such as interviews and document review.



Document and file review

A document review was conducted to gather insight into the programs and included: internal departmental documents, previous evaluations, Integrated Aboriginal Policy Framework, program documentation, recipient documentation, and National Indigenous Fisheries Institute reports.

Limitations and mitigation

It should be acknowledged that not all Indigenous program recipients may be equally reflected in the documents reviewed by the evaluation team. In this context, communities that participate in the different committees, meetings, reports, etc. of the programs, may be from committees that have greater capacity in terms of resources. Other communities that may not have the resources to participate in committees, meetings, reports, etc. organised by the programs, and their views may not be reflected in documents reviewed by the evaluation. This could potentially have limited the range of perspectives gathered through the evaluation. However, to mitigate this limitation, the responses were triangulated with other lines of evidence.

Annex A: Methodology, limitations and mitigation strategies (2 of 2)



Survey

An internal survey was conducted from September 25 to October 19, 2023, by the evaluation team to gather information on the level of awareness of the AAROM program, specifically on AAROM as a network and as a platform. The survey questions and responses were mainly to support the efficiency questions of the evaluation. The survey was sent to 56 DFO employees, involved with the Aboriginal Programs, from all regions and from different sectors i.e., from Programs, Strategic Policy, etc. Sixteen completed surveys were received, representing approximately 29% response rate.

Limitations and mitigation

Many of the survey responders were from the AAROM program which may have created limitations in having a more representative sample from responders who are from other sectors as well as other Aboriginal programs. Therefore, to address this potential limitation, survey results were triangulated with other lines of evidence.

All Indigenous program recipients that responded to the brief survey and wanted to participate in the evaluation were contacted by the evaluation team. Indigenous Peoples contributed in various ways: six virtual interviews, four written submissions, three site visits, and three in-person discussions. Indigenous Peoples that shared their views in the evaluation volunteered to participate and the information was collected from September 25, 2023, to November 3, 2023.

From September 25 to 27, 2023, the evaluation team undertook three site visits in the Atlantic and Gulf regions to meet and discuss with Indigenous Peoples and gather evidence for the evaluation. During the site visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to attend the CDT Orientation Meeting, which was held September 26, 2023, and allowed the evaluation team to do field-observations.

Limitations and mitigation

Considering that Indigenous program recipients volunteered to participate in the evaluation, it is possible that those who were interested in being part of the evaluation were part of Indigenous communities with higher capacity. On the other hand, communities with less resources may not have participated, therefore potentially limiting the range of perspectives gathered through the evaluation. However, to mitigate this limitation, the responses were triangulated with other lines of evidence. In addition, while key themes were identified and summarized together in this document, the evaluation team acknowledges that all First Nations and Inuit communities are distinct, with diverse experiences.



Indigenous Participation

The evaluation team engaged with Indigenous program recipients to gather their views on the AFS and AAROM programs. The team reached out to a group of Indigenous Peoples that are recipients of AFS and AAROM and who also participated in the co-delivery work undertaken by both programs. DFO programs representatives provided the evaluation team with approximately 65 participating indigenous communities. A brief survey was sent via email to invite communities to provide feedback in the manner of their choice such as: virtual interviews, written responses, recorded site tours, photovoice submissions, and in-person site visits.

Annex B: Management Action Plan (1 of 8)

Evaluation of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans
Approval Date: July 23, 2024
MAP Completion Target Date: March 31, 2026
Lead ADM/DC: ADM, Programs Sector

Recommendation 1: March 2026

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, co-design, co-develop, and co-deliver a framework to support the full implementation of an Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program within the department. This will require the collaboration between Conservation and Protection and the Indigenous Affairs Directorate.

Rationale: Despite the [IPR recommendations](#) (including implementing the AFG as a ‘stand-alone’ program), alongside the commitments were made in DFO’s [Action Plan for Renewal and Expansion of DFO’s Indigenous Programs](#) (the Action Plan) for the renewal of the AFG program, ongoing Reconciliation efforts, and the recently published [United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2023-2028 \(UNDA\)](#), (referenced on page 19) progress on the renewal of the AFG component (of the AFS), has been limited. The RMOT has proven to be a successful interim practice, however there is still a critical gap in meeting Indigenous community needs which could hinder relationships with Indigenous Peoples. However, for the renewal of the AFG to be realized, continued collaboration between Conservation and Protection and the Indigenous Affairs Directorate is essential and should reflect their respective roles and authorities for implementation. The utilization of the co-development, co-design and co-delivery approach will ensure diverse perspectives are considered throughout the process.

Management Response

C&P Management agrees with the recommendation and has already begun work to address it. C&P, supported by IAD have identified a strategy for AFG program renewal that aligns with ongoing Reconciliation efforts, the published Action Plan for the UNDA and recommendations from the IPR. Over a 24-month period, subject matter experts within the department will employ the co-development, co-design, co-delivery (co-co-co) model to establish a nationally consistent framework for renewed AFGs designated under the Fisheries Act. C&P has recently posted a Request for Proposal (RFP) (February 5, 2024) for contractors who will design training for incoming new AFGs. This contractor will do this collaboratively with Indigenous groups and Indigenous subject matter experts, Guardians, Indigenous Knowledge holders and communities, as well as Departmental representatives to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of the department, and the various communities across the country with Guardian programs. The initial curriculum development will focus on developing training to be provided to newly onboarded Guardians. As well, concurrent internal and Co-co-co working groups on national policies and procedures will occur, to clearly set out Roles and Responsibilities, designation policy, equipment standards and operational policies, creating a coherent operational framework that can support the designation of AFGs.

Annex B: Management Action Plan (2 of 8)

Link to larger program or departmental results (if applicable)			
MAP Results Statement <i>Result to be achieved in response to the recommendation</i>	MAP Milestones <i>Critical accomplishments to ensure achievement of result for PMEC's approval</i>	Completion Date <i>Month, Year</i>	DG Responsible
1. The operational framework for the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program is developed with the active engagement and participation of Indigenous co-development, co-design, and co-delivery partners.	1.1. A contract for the development of a standardized training curriculum is assigned to a curriculum developer.	April 2024	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.2. Operational policies pertaining to equipment specifications, quality control measures, and equipment inspection protocols are reviewed and updated.	December 2024	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.3. The curriculum developer, in collaboration with program officials, Indigenous groups, and Indigenous subject matter experts, finalizes initial review and assessment of existing training material, new training program development, and standardization efforts.	March 2025	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.4. Uniform and identification policies and procedures are reviewed and updated, ensuring the enhancement of professionalism, safety and security, promoting national consistency, and the reinforcement of cultural sensitivities.	November 2025	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.5 All currently designated Guardians are trained to the new standard.	December 2025	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.6 Training curriculum is finalized	March 2026	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD
	1.7 Operational policies are reviewed and updated, ensuring the development of collaborative management, the strengthening of relationship building strategies, and integration of traditional knowledge and practices into the AFG program.	March 2026	DG, C&P in consultation with: • DG, IAD



Annex B: Management Action Plan (3 of 8)

Recommendation 2: January 2026

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, strengthen communication, orientation, and coordination regarding the co-design, co-development and co-delivery (co-co-co) approach for the AFS and AAROM programs and ensure that Departmental employees in national headquarters, other sectors and regions, use the co-co-co approach in the delivery of programming, while tailoring it to Indigenous community needs.

Rationale: The commitments made as part of the [Action Plan for Renewal and Expansion of DFO's Indigenous Programs](#) (the Action Plan) have led to improvements for the co-design, co-development and co-delivery approach for the AFS and AAROM programs, such as defining processes and developing mechanisms and governance structures. However, there were gaps identified (e.g., inconsistent regional application, training for Indigenous cultural competency), particularly at the operational level. DFO's current commitments in the Action Plan do not address these gaps. Additional efforts and practices are required to ensure proper orientation of all Departmental program staff and regional staff regarding co-co-co and its effective communication and adoption, internally as well as with and between Indigenous partners. Greater communication and coordination between national headquarters, other sectors and regional offices will promote a more holistic approach, ensuring consistency of application across regions and sectors with Indigenous partners, while tailoring initiatives to meet specific Indigenous community needs.

Management Response

DFO's Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) agrees with the recommendation and recognizes the need to improve operational understanding and awareness of co-development, co-design and co-delivery (co-co-co) across regions, sectors, and with Indigenous partners. The principle and importance of co-co-co was clearly articulated through the [Indigenous Program Review \(IPR\)](#) process. It relies on collaboration between Indigenous experts and government officials at the technical and operational levels – absent political agendas – to ensure programs function effectively, support capacity building over the longer-term, and maximize benefits to Indigenous peoples. Cross-cutting issues outlined by the [Action Plan for the Renewal and Expansion of DFO's Indigenous Programs](#) highlighted the need to expand the co-co-co approach by enabling greater networking.

Building on the Action Plan's commitment to administrative improvements, IAD will continue to advance renewal of the AFS and AAROM platforms by reviewing and assessing the tools and strategies needed to orient staff, engage Indigenous participants, and deliver consistent national programming. The core tenets of the co-co-co principle will be reaffirmed with experts on the joint DFO-Indigenous Collaborative Program Management Committee (CPMC), and national governance, guidance, training materials, and communications and networking strategies will be updated to inform how it is applied in practice. Tools that provide reliable access to these updated materials will also be identified and will help to ensure program staff and Indigenous participants are able to work consistently, collaboratively, and respectfully in the development of workplans and funding arrangements that are tailored to their short, medium and long-term capacity building objectives.

Embedding the co-co-co approach in foundational program materials that are shared internally and externally will allow the AFS and AAROM platforms to better communicate and coordinate across regions and sectors, improve cultural competency amongst DFO staff, and facilitate joint training and learning opportunities with Indigenous participants to increase understanding how the programs can best support collaborative fisheries and aquatic resource management.



Annex B: Management Action Plan (4 of 8)

Link to the larger program or departmental results (if applicable)			
MAP Results Statement <i>Result to be achieved in response to the recommendation</i>	MAP Milestones <i>Critical accomplishments to ensure achievement of result for PMEC's approval</i>	Completion Date <i>Month, Year</i>	DG Responsible
2. National program governance, guidance, training plans, communications tools and strategies, are updated to further reflect the principle of co-development, co-design and co-delivery, and are shared and accessible to DFO staff and external participants or delivery partners in a way that strengthens shared understanding and consistent application.	2.1 Existing program governance, guidance, training plans, communications tools and strategies, are reviewed and assessed by a working group of national and regional program staff for relevance and consistency with the findings, recommendations and approaches established through IPR and the DFO Action Plan. Identified gaps are presented to the joint DFO-Indigenous management committee (CPMC) for consideration.	September, 2024	DG IAD
	2.2 Based on the assessment and related advice and direction from CPMC, updates or revisions to existing program governance, guidance, training plans and communications tools and strategies are prepared, with supplemental materials developed as required. Renewed content is brought back to CPMC for endorsement.	May, 2025	DG, IAD
	2.3 Updated program materials, training plans and communications materials are finalized and approved by the Director General (DG), Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) and shared with internal and external participants and delivery partners through recognized and accessible communications channels.	September, 2025	DG, IAD
	2.4 AFS and AAROM program managers use updated governance, guidance, learning plans and communications tools and strategies to pilot new joint program training opportunities and administrative workshops with interested Indigenous participants.	January, 2026	DG, IAD



Annex B: Management Action Plan (5 of 8)

Recommendation 3: February 2026

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, review and update AFS and AAROM performance measurements to reflect Indigenous definitions of success as the groundwork to inform and support a future departmental undertaking to update performance measurement in the Aboriginal Programs and Treaties (APT) performance information profile (PIP) for greater accountability and better strategic decision-making.

Rationale: While AFS and AAROM collect and report on performance data, there is a need to reassess the quality, relevance, and meaningfulness of the data being collected. The evaluation found that the performance information that is used for AFS and AAROM programs does not adequately include meaningful performance measurements (including definitions) that provide information to demonstrate the achievement of results and management of the programs.

Within the timeframe of the Management Action Plan, working with Indigenous partners to align program objectives and performance measurements to reflect Indigenous-desired outcomes will inform and support a future departmental process to review Indigenous-related performance measurements in the PIP for the APT. Aligning AFS and AAROM performance measurements to Indigenous definitions of success is in line with the Indigenous Program Review's (IPR) recommendations, and will allow for a more accurate understanding of the programs' ability to achieve its results, particularly within the context of Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan.

Management Response

Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) agrees that the data and information used to report on AFS and AAROM program performance requires updating. The need to reassess the quality, relevance and meaningfulness of AFS and AAROM performance measurement is well understood and was outlined as a cross-cutting issue by the Action Plan for the Renewal and Expansion of DFO's Indigenous Programs, which highlighted the need to reflect Indigenous definitions of success in the desired outcomes of the program and improve tracking and reporting of performance over time. Performance measurement that is better aligned with Indigenous perspectives and objectives will ensure that the AFS and AAROM platforms more accurately understand how they can best contribute to capacity development and collaborative management and support strategic decision-making.

Indigenous Programs branch will conduct a review of its approach to performance measurement and the tools it uses to collect and manage related data or information. Consistent with the principle of co-development, co-design and co-delivery, it will coordinate its work with internal and external oversight bodies and program delivery partners, including (but not limited to) DFO's Results Division, the joint DFO-Indigenous Collaborative Program Management Committee (CPMC), and the Indigenous-led Capacity Development Team (CDT). This will result in renewed performance measurement statements and metrics that are relevant and meaningful to Indigenous partners, reinforce mechanisms that support reliable data collection through existing administrative processes, and generate information that can support AFS and AAROM results reporting. Over the longer-term, this work will inform future departmental efforts to update Indigenous-focused results and indicators in the performance information profile (PIP) for the Aboriginal Programs and Treaties (APT).



Annex B: Management Action Plan (6 of 8)

Link to larger program or departmental results (if applicable)			
MAP Results Statement <i>Result to be achieved in response to the recommendation</i>	MAP Milestones <i>Critical accomplishments to ensure achievement of result for PMEC's approval</i>	Completion Date <i>Month, Year</i>	DG Responsible
3. AFS and AAROM performance measurement statements and data collection methods are co-designed and co-developed to reflect Indigenous definitions of success and better support program results reporting, accountability, and strategic decision-making.	3.1 Indigenous co-development, co-design and co-delivery partners are engaged to identify performance measurement statements and metrics that meaningfully reflect Indigenous definitions of success and contribute to improved results reporting.	December, 2024	DG, IAD
	3.2 Tools and protocols are developed in collaboration with Indigenous program delivery partners and regional DFO management teams to strengthen and streamline the intake, management and synthesis of performance data shared by AFS and AAROM participants in response to identified indicators.	June, 2025	DG, IAD
	3.3 Performance measurement statements, tools and protocols are piloted with Indigenous program participants to validate relevance and utility in AFS and AAROM results reporting and accountability.	December, 2025	DG, IAD
	3.4 Performance measurement statements, metrics and data collection tools and protocols are finalized and endorsed by the joint DFO-Indigenous management committee (CPMC), approved by the DG of Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) and can inform future departmental efforts to update Indigenous-focused results and indicators in the performance information profile (PIP) for the Aboriginal Programs and Treaties (APT).	March, 2026	DG, IAD



Annex B: Management Action Plan (7 of 8)

Recommendation 4: April 2025

Recommendation: In further support of effective program planning and implementation, it is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, strengthen tools and methods for the collection and use of financial and resource information related to staffing and program management.

Rationale: The evaluation found that funding is generally disbursed in a timely manner. However, since AFS and AAROM are used as 'platforms' to flow funding to other Indigenous initiatives within the department, it was challenging to clearly distinguish expenditures allocated to AFS and AAROM versus those for other initiatives as well as accounting for the number of actual FTEs dedicated to these programs. Enhanced tracking and management of financial information will be beneficial for the program, addressing concerns about limited staffing resources and improving overall efficiency in program delivery.

Management Response

Indigenous Affairs Directorate (IAD) and its Indigenous Programs branch agree with the recommendation and recognize the importance of strengthening the tools and methods used to monitor and track operational resources. Responsible for delivering funding arrangements to more than 175 Indigenous communities and organizations across the country, the long-standing AFS and AAROM programs rely on a decentralized approach that leverages existing financial and human resource capacity within the National Capital Region (NCR), regional headquarters (RHQs) and localized Area offices. Over time, the ability to clearly and consistently account for the resources required to manage the programs has been affected by staff turnover, attrition, departmental reorganization, and other managerial or budgetary decision-making. This has been compounded by the fact that the AFS and AAROM platforms are regularly tasked with delivering other DFO programming that targets Indigenous engagement or participation, with core staff assuming responsibility for workloads that are not otherwise resourced.

Indigenous Programs branch will collaborate with the office of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and regional DFO program managers to review existing financial and human resources, along with the tools and strategies used to track and report on them. This will foster a shared understanding of the resources used to deliver the programs and the ways in which they are monitored and managed. Where appropriate, new or updated protocols and guidance will be developed to ensure that program resources are clearly accounted for and can be reported on in a way that demonstrates requirement, effectiveness and efficiency.

Annex B: Management Action Plan (8 of 8)

Link to the larger program or departmental results (if applicable)			
MAP Results Statement <i>Result to be achieved in response to the recommendation</i>	MAP Milestones <i>Critical accomplishments to ensure achievement of result for PMEC's approval</i>	Completion Date <i>Month, Year</i>	DG Responsible
4. Protocols and guidance to inform nationally consistent management of financial and human resources are reviewed and updated in collaboration with CFO and shared with regional management teams.	4.1 National and regional AFS and AAROM program managers analyze existing program resources and define operational needs and objectives as they relate to financial and human resource monitoring, tracking and reporting.	June, 2024	DG, IAD
	4.2 Established guidance on Vote 1 tracking is reviewed, assessed and updated in collaboration with CFO and regional AFS and AAROM representatives to ensure alignment with identified Departmental information and management requirements.	October, 2024	DG, IAD
	4.3 Updated protocols and guidance are piloted by national and regional program management teams to validate effectiveness.	January, 2025	DG, IAD
	4.4 Renewed protocols and guidance are finalized and approved by the Director General (IAD) and are ready for implementation by the programs.	April, 2025	DG, IAD

