



MAY 29 2017

Mr. Scott Simms
Chair, Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
The House of Commons of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A4

Dear Mr. Simms:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for its report, *Wild Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada*. I am pleased to receive the Committee's recommendations.

I note that the majority of the recommendations are consistent with initiatives currently being advanced or considered by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), pursuant to the *Departmental Forward Plan for Atlantic Salmon*. The *Forward Plan* was completed in July, 2016 as DFO's response to the wide-ranging recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Atlantic Salmon. It constitutes a comprehensive program-of-work for the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon and is available to Parliamentarians and the public on the DFO website.

I would also like to highlight that my Department understands the cultural significance of wild Atlantic salmon to Indigenous communities. Accordingly, we are committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through a renewed nation-to-nation relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership as the foundation.

It is noteworthy that your Committee's recommendations are clustered around three main themes: fisheries management and habitat related to Atlantic salmon; enhancing science capacity and understanding; and collaboration with Indigenous partners. Please allow me to respond to each theme individually:

Fisheries management and habitat related to Atlantic salmon

- With respect to measures to enhance the management of Atlantic salmon, protect their habitat, and represent Canada's interests internationally regarding over-harvesting, the Committee's recommendations (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16) reflect and align well both with current activities underway as well as the future direction we intend to take for the stewardship of this important resource. Wild Atlantic salmon is used for food, social and ceremonial purposes by Indigenous communities, and is important to the cultural life of local and coastal communities. Economically, Atlantic salmon generates \$115 million in GDP and approximately 3,300 in full-time equivalent jobs. We have supported studies that underscore these benefits.
- In order to protect fish habitat and promote conservation, including the conservation of Atlantic salmon habitat, Budget 2017 is investing \$43.8 million over five years to protect Canada's marine and freshwater ecosystems by preventing the introduction of aquatic invasive species. These investments will help advance and complement DFO's efforts currently underway on the Committee's recommendations, such as: initiatives to control non-native species, including smallmouth bass in Miramichi Lake; and a review of the Recreational Fishery Conservation Partnership Program.
- Your recommendations regarding habitat protection and disruption or destruction of Atlantic salmon habitat also align very well with my mandate commitments to review the *Fisheries Act* in order to restore lost protections and incorporate modern safeguards. DFO has undertaken its consultations to advance work on this review, and will be consulting further. I am confident that any changes that will be brought forward to the *Fisheries Act* will benefit the habitat and conservation of all fish species, including Atlantic salmon.
- Presently, DFO is reviewing the *Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy* in partnership with members of the Atlantic Salmon Advisory Committee. This review process will help map our direction with respect to the management and conservation of Atlantic salmon, going forward. It will also re-emphasize conservation as the highest priority and institute an ongoing process to develop implementation plans for the policy, which will account for region specific challenges. This will help ensure that several of the Committee's recommendations are incorporated into DFO's ongoing program-of-work.
- Concerning the Committee's recommendation for a delegation to Greenland, I assure you that Canada's position remains clear: to push for Greenland to implement stronger management measures and reduce its harvesting level, in support of conservation. DFO thus remains committed to working directly with Greenland, and with other parties who have a shared interest, through the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization.

Enhancing science capacity and understanding

- I am pleased to see the Committee has made several recommendations (2, 10, 11, 17) to increase our science capacity to support conservation and to understand the impacts of climate change on Atlantic salmon. As per the Committee's recommendation, DFO is in fact re-investing in science, including the deployment of additional scientists to work on Atlantic salmon. Budget 2016, for instance, invested \$197.1 million in ocean and freshwater science, a portion of which will directly benefit Atlantic salmon. Budget 2017 is also providing \$21.6 million over four years starting in 2017-18, to renew DFO and Transport Canada's climate change adaptation and resilience programming, which will help us to better understand and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- In October, 2016, DFO launched the Atlantic Salmon Research Joint Venture, which is Canada's first collaborative research forum for Atlantic salmon to bring together experts from the Government of Canada, the US, Indigenous groups, provincial agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other stakeholders to prioritize scientific research and information-sharing. The Joint Venture will specifically advance the Standing Committee's recommendations for research into the effects of climate change on wild Atlantic salmon, at-sea survival, and in-river concerns.
- With respect to the recommendation for aquaculture and closed containment, DFO is currently exploring options for legislative reform for aquaculture, which includes the development of a federal Aquaculture Act, designed in part to enable the establishment of national standards to ensure greater environmental protection for fisheries and fish habitat. Regarding the specific issue of closed containment, DFO has a long-standing position of technology neutrality in order to foster innovation across a spectrum of technologies and approaches to sustainable aquaculture development.

Collaboration with Indigenous partners

- I fully support the Committee's recommendations (8, 15) calling for stronger collaboration with Indigenous communities and providing them with opportunities as active partners in the stewardship, management and conservation of fisheries resources. I was particularly glad to see this theme emerge in the Committee's Report because it is a key component of our Government's Reconciliation Agenda.
- I am therefore very pleased to note that Budget 2017 is allocating \$250 million over five years and \$62.2 million on an ongoing basis to expand integrated commercial fisheries initiatives and to augment Indigenous collaborative management programming. These measures will ensure that Indigenous communities can create jobs by building sustainable commercial fishing businesses. In addition to these investments, DFO has also initiated work to advance the Committee's other recommendations, such as the provision of opportunities for Indigenous peoples and recreational fisheries to have access to the healthy striped bass stocks in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

In closing, on behalf of the Government, I thank the Standing Committee members once again for their diligence, and more specifically for their vision and commitment to conserving this iconic species for the benefit of current and future generations of Canadians.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. LeBlanc', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., Q.C., M.P.