

Minister of
Fisheries and Oceans



Ministre des
Pêches et des Océans

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E6

JUN 3 0 2020

Mr. Ken McDonald
Chair
Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. McDonald:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (the Committee) for its report, *West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits*. I am pleased to receive the Committee's recommendations and would like to thank the Committee members for dedicating their time and effort to highlighting ways to make our fisheries more environmentally and socio-economically sustainable for present and future generations of Canadians. This report provides valuable insight into the state of the Pacific fisheries and its licensing policies, and on how independent harvesters and other participants are responding to changes and challenges as the industry continues to evolve. The Committee's recommendations on how to improve the transparency of the existing fisheries management framework and how to revise existing policies and programs will help guide the Government in its continued work to achieve socio-economic, environmental and cultural objectives.

In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the sustainability of our fisheries – as a vital part of our food supply, as well as an important source of jobs and economic activity for coastal communities – has never been more critical. In recent weeks, the Government has launched a number of initiatives that will provide direct support to businesses and workers in the fish and seafood sector, including the Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund, as well as the Fish Harvester Benefit and Fish Harvester Grant. While responding to the immediate challenges of the pandemic is our first priority, we will continue our efforts to ensure that policy frameworks are well-suited to the unique social, economic and environmental contexts of our fisheries, and the Committee's views will greatly inform our work.

I also note that the Committee's recommendations are aligned with several continuing Government priorities, including strengthening the middle class, improving transparency in government, and sustainable and inclusive economic development. Consistent with these priorities, the Government introduced Bill C-68 in the previous Parliament to amend the *Fisheries Act*. These statutory changes include reinforcement of the authority of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to consider social, economic, and cultural factors in decision-making with respect to fisheries.

Canada

The Committee's study has reaffirmed that achieving sustainability in fisheries means striking a balance between many different interests and objectives. Furthermore, while several of the recommendations point to existing policies and tools employed on Canada's East Coast as a solution, the Government shares the Committee's assessment that Canada should pursue an approach that is tailored to the needs and interests of British Columbians, including independent harvesters. Fisheries and Oceans Canada will continue to review and improve the policies, services and tools for fisheries on the West Coast.

During the Committee's study, the Government noted that the West Coast licensing regime has evolved through a focus on ensuring the conservation of fish stocks for future generations, and that the environmental, social, cultural and economic factors and events that influenced this system were different from those of the Eastern regions, albeit equally important. Consistent with the Government's current approach, any modifications to licensing policy or processes that may be pursued in the future would be developed in a way that will not negatively impact longstanding efforts to achieve conservation objectives. Concurrently, the Government must also consider ways to support the viability of fishing enterprises, including independent harvesters facing financial challenges.

The Government supports the principle that stakeholder engagement must include a diverse cross section of perspectives and interests, including harvesters, licence holders, crew, Indigenous groups, industry representatives, the provincial government, community representatives, and others that have an interest in the way commercial fisheries are managed. The Committee had the opportunity to hear perspectives from a variety of witnesses that support change, and the Government acknowledges the challenges being faced by independent harvesters in the Pacific region as they work to maintain their operations in the face of increasingly competitive global markets and changing stock conditions. The Committee also heard from parties who noted the expectation that industry be able to self-rationalise, the importance of transferability of licences and quotas, and the role processors have played in providing harvesters access to capital and the resource.

Since the Committee tabled its report last spring, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has advanced work to assess the report's recommendations and where feasible, has started to collect information and data to inform our next steps. This has included initiating a comparative analysis of fisheries policies and regulations in effect on Canada's East and West Coasts as well as analysing existing data in the Pacific licence management system to identify gaps. Recognising the divergence of views and the critical importance of management and licensing issues to all commercial fishery interests, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will further consult the Government of British Columbia, Indigenous groups, harvesters, and others on the issues raised in the Committee's report. Given the current challenges posed by COVID-19, these consultations will begin as soon as feasible.

The Government also shares the Committee's view that the needs, rights and capacities of Indigenous harvesters and their communities must be respected and implemented. The Government will continue to use the spirit of reconciliation to guide and improve the nation-to-nation relationships between the Crown and Indigenous communities, including the continued

negotiation of treaty and non-treaty reconciliation agreements, the deployment of collaborative management structures, and the continued application of the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative and Allocation Transfer Program as a means of increasing Indigenous access to the fishery on the West Coast.

The Government of Canada promotes a sustainable blue economy that includes an economically viable fishing industry, creates jobs and promotes economic prosperity in coastal communities. I recognize the importance of transparency in the licencing regime to support this prosperity. The Government is committed to further exploring approaches that are within my legal purview, and to initiating discussions to clarify roles, responsibilities and potential partnerships to continue to improve the Pacific management and licensing regime.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for their diligence and commitment in studying and providing recommendations for preserving Canadian commercial fisheries for current and future generations. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to ensuring that the management of Pacific fisheries is economically viable and sustainable and is committed to continued improvements in managing fisheries on the West Coast.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'B' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Honourable Bernadette Jordan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard