

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

Program overview

This evaluation focused on two Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) programs: the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS) and the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) program. These programs focus on building capacity and participation of Indigenous Peoples in fisheries and aquatic resource management. Also, AFS and AAROM core funding can serve as a platform for Indigenous Peoples to access other program opportunities within DFO and inter-departmentally. Please refer to the evaluation report for more details on these two programs.

About the evaluation

In accordance with the Departmental Evaluation Plan, an evaluation of the AFS and AAROM programs was conducted by DFO's Evaluation Division. The evaluation complies with the Treasury Board Policy on Results and meets the obligations of the *Financial Administration Act*.

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 regions: Newfoundland and Labrador; Maritimes; Gulf; Quebec; Ontario and Prairie; Artic and Pacific. The evaluation was designed to provide evidence on where the programs were working well, as well as to identify where improvements could be made. The evaluation included an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the AFS and AAROM programs. The methodology included a document and file review, 44 interviews including participation from 16 Indigenous program recipients, financial and data analysis.

Key findings

Relevance

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

The programs face challenges in addressing some of the identified needs for the following reasons: different levels of existing capacity within communities; AFS's program design does not always align with recipients' needs, including the Aboriginal Fishery Guardians (AFG) component; limited financial resources; training; and staffing, recruitment, and retention.

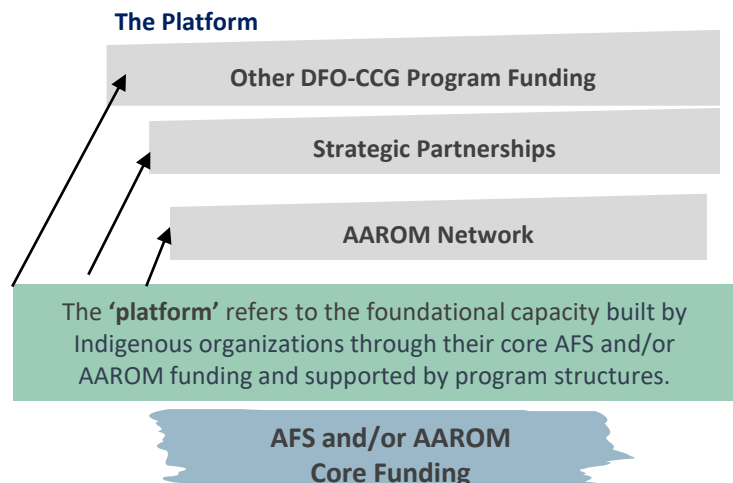
Effectiveness

The implementation of DFO's Action Plan for the Renewal of Indigenous programming, crafted in response to key Indigenous Program Review's (IPR) recommendations, is advancing successfully. In the Action Plan, AFS, AAROM and AFG were implicated in the implementation of six renewal streams.

Core funding

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. Additional funding also increased capacity building and the ability for groups and communities to participate in the programs. Despite this, internal and external key informants still perceive program funding as insufficient.

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



Project funds

Accessing additional project funds such as the AAROM Innovation and Collaboration Fund and the Capacity Support Fund have supported Indigenous program recipients to build capacity.

Co-design, co-development and co-delivery (Co-co-co)

The programs have advanced the implementation of the co-design, co-development, and co-delivery approach. The Resource Management Officer Technician is a good example of co-development between the Indigenous Affairs Directorate and the Collaborative Programs Management Committee (CPMC) as a career path forward and as an interim solution to the AFG's limited progress on renewal. As well, the establishment of governance structures were seen as key to its successful application.

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

Network activities

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

Administrative renewal

An administrative renewal is currently underway to improve processes including multi-year contribution agreements, streamlining reporting requirements and approvals, and improving data management (e.g., Grants and Contributions Agreement Tracking System).

New entrants

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

Efficiency

- The programs received renewal funding, however, limited internal and external resources pose challenges to program delivery, including recruitment and retention of staff.
- The Indigenous Affairs Directorate, through the AFS and the CPMC, co-developed the Resource Management Officer Technician 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.
- In the current Reconciliation and *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* context, there is a continued need for the AFG, and it is perceived to be an important element in maintaining respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples. This is also in line with the IPR recommendation to implement the AFG as a stand-alone program.
- 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.
- Finally, findings point to the timely disbursement of contribution agreements for AFS and AAROM. However, tracking financial 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).

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the ADM Programs Sector, co-develop, co-design, and co-deliver a framework to support the full implementation of an AFG program within the department. This will require the collaboration between Conservation and Protection and the Indigenous Affairs Directorate.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the ADM, Programs Sector, strengthen communication, coordination, and orientation 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.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the ADM, Programs Sector, review and update AFS and AAROM performance measurements to reflect Indigenous definitions of success as the groundwork to inform a future departmental undertaking to update performance measurement in the Aboriginal Programs and Treaties performance information profile for greater accountability and better strategic decision-making.

Recommendation 4: In further support of effective program planning and implementation, it is recommended that the ADM, Programs Sector, strengthen tools and methods for the collection and use of financial and resource information related to staffing and program management.