



Engaging Indigenous Women in all their Gender Diversity in Fish and Fish Habitat Conservation and Protection

Summary

During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) led Wave 4 of the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program (FFHPP), with funding provided by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). This phase focused on how both natural and human-caused environmental changes affect the rights, livelihoods, and values of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse+ (WG2SGD+) Peoples. The findings are intended to inform future updates to the *Fisheries Act* and guide the application of the *Species at Risk Act*.

To support this, NWAC completed three deliverables: a Synthesis Report analyzing earlier engagement findings (Waves 1 to 3), a virtual roundtable with Indigenous WG2SGD+ Peoples sharing lived and professional experiences, and a national online survey to gather additional perspectives.



Synthesis Report: *Drivers of Change in Fish and Fish Habitats*

This report shares NWAC's work on the Indigenous Habitat Protection Program (IHPP) and brings together insights from the *What We Heard* reports produced during Waves 1 to 3 of the FFHPP. It reflects NWAC's contributions to date and highlights recurring themes, community concerns, and the critical importance of centring Indigenous voices in environmental decision-making.

Five key takeaways were identified: the meaningful integration of Indigenous Knowledge throughout all phases of project development; the establishment of long-term partnerships with Indigenous communities; the fostering of trust through respectful and transparent communication; the recognition and honoring of Indigenous relationships to land and water; and the importance of ensuring that engagement processes are inclusive and culturally responsive.





Roundtable Discussion: *Gender-Informed Values and Perspectives of Fish and Fish Habitat Protection*

The roundtable brought together Indigenous WG2SGD+ Peoples focused on gender-informed perspectives on climate change and discussed three key themes: the impacts of human and climate-related changes on fish and fish habitats; how Indigenous values and rights are impacted concerning fish and fish habitats; and the unique vulnerabilities of Indigenous WG2SGD+ individuals to these impacts.

Participants highlighted how environmental decline, such as reduced fish populations and poor water quality, has disrupted cultural practices and local economies. They also noted that weak environmental protections and policies have undermined Indigenous rights, especially the right to protect lands and waters. Discussions emphasized the deep personal and collective impacts caused by the loss of cultural and environmental displacement.

There was a strong call for greater Indigenous leadership in environmental governance, equal recognition of Traditional Knowledge alongside Western science, and reforms to laws like the *Fisheries Act* to better reflect Indigenous experiences and rights.



National Survey: *Impacts of Change to Fish and Fish Habitats*

NWAC conducted a national online survey (January-February 2025) to gather input from Indigenous WG2SGD+ Peoples on environmental challenges in their communities. The survey received more than 300 responses from across Canada.

Key findings were identified: fish and fish habitats play a vital role in cultural traditions, heritage preservation, and spiritual practices, including knowledge sharing and ceremonies; noticeable changes to these habitats are creating vulnerabilities related to food security, economic resilience, and recreational support, and reduced access would significantly impact Indigenous communities, particularly in these aspects; nearby habitats help strengthen family and community ties through social connection which supports overall health and well-being.

Moving Forward: Protecting fish and fish habitats helps preserve Indigenous Knowledge and traditions, while also supporting food security, economic opportunities, and spiritual and cultural well-being. The DFO and NWAC can continue to strengthen their efforts to protect fish and fish habitats and uphold the rights of Indigenous WG2SGD+ Peoples, promoting a more inclusive, balanced, and effective approach to policy development.

