

The Wildlife Society
Manitoba Chapter



February 12, 2018

Honourable Rochelle Squires
Manitoba Sustainable Development
Room 344, Legislative Building
450 Broadway Ave, Winnipeg, MB
R3C 0V8

Dear Honourable Squires,

On behalf of the Wildlife Society Manitoba Chapter, we would like to congratulate you on the successful achievement of enhancing marketing choice for fisheries in Manitoba. We are excited to see your government continue to work towards maintaining sustainable fisheries, and were pleased to see this initiative included in the Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan, as well as the continued effort to secure certification of Manitoba's commercial fisheries. Certification will ensure that Manitoba's fisheries stay competitive in the global market, as well as protecting our fisheries resources for future generations.

As the Department mentioned in a previous response, dated January 19, 2017, your government recognized that achieving sustainable fishing certification standards is vital for all who rely on the resource. The success of certification of Waterhen Lake is commendable and demonstrates the technical skill and capacity within the Manitoba Sustainable Development Departments' Wildlife and Fisheries Branch. We are pleased to hear that you have dedicated a portion of the Fisheries section as a Sustainable Fisheries Unit and that there may be up to 18 more sustainable fisheries certified in coming years. This is admirable progress and we are encouraged by your governments' efforts in improving Manitoba's fisheries.

We do however; remain concerned about the lack of data to support certification and sustainable fisheries, specifically on Lake Winnipeg. The walleye fishery on Lake Winnipeg supports hundreds of commercial fishers, provides critical employment in rural and remote parts of the Province, and provides world-class recreational fishing opportunities with millions of dollars directly and indirectly fed into the economy. Data released by the Manitoba Sustainable Development Department and published by the Winnipeg Free Press in December 2017 suggests that the current overall harvest of walleye may be unsustainable and result in population collapse if left unchecked. As it stands, there is not enough data to fully understand the status of this fishery. It is this lack of data which led SeaChoice to give Manitoba's three largest fisheries (Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba, and Lake Winnipegosis) a failing grade in 2015 and stands in the way of obtaining successful certification for Manitoba's fisheries. Collapse of marketable species would negatively impact both the natural processes of this freshwater ecosystem, the multi-million dollar recreational, and commercial fishing industries.

We are aware management concerns regarding overharvest are frustrating to commercial fishers who feel strongly that they have practiced sustainable fishing practices for decades; however, even they feel

frustrated by the current lack of fisheries data, as mentioned many times in the Westdal report (https://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/water_quality/lake_winnipeg/pdf/fisheries_final_rpt.pdf), released June 2016. We also understand that the idea of making changes to quotas at this time may seem unfeasible from a socioeconomic perspective; however, the impacts to the recreational fishing economy must be considered too.

What is clear is that in order to reach certification of Manitoba's commercial fisheries, it is necessary to make improvements to both the collection and management of scientific fisheries data. Our organization strongly encourages the use of science in policy and management decisions, and have included a copy of our position statement on this topic. This is an ideal time to implement improved data collection on fishing effort as well as ensuring that existing data collected previously through the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation continues to be collected. We would suggest the development of a robust monitoring system which is able to accurately quantify fisheries harvest (including a way to measure by-catch) and includes some measures of fishing effort.

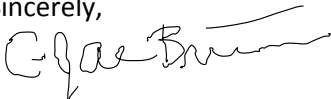
One possible way to do this would be to implement a sentinel fisheries program, which could not only improve data collection but also facilitate positive working relationships with fishers. We recognize that there is a frustration among commercial fishers who feel as though their understanding and knowledge of the fishery is underutilized; therefore, a program that works with fishers to monitor harvest may be a way to foster collaboration between fisheries managers and fishers.

We would also like to highlight the importance of having a centralized and standardized database in which managers and others can track information from all fish purchases in a timely way. These efforts would similarly be a positive move towards strong data management and certification.

We are aware that making these changes will take time and resources, but we feel hopeful that during this period of change, it may be possible to create positive adaptations to fisheries management which will serve Manitoba's fish populations in the future. There are many uncertain environmental conditions which may impact our fisheries in the future; for example the introduction of zebra mussels, changes to the rainbow smelt population, ongoing eutrophication, and changing climate and temperature regimes. We feel strongly that the use of resources from a carbon tax would be well suited to reinvest into fisheries management, and would allow all Manitoban's to look forward to enjoying this incredible fishery for years to come.

We want to thank you again for your commendable efforts towards creating sustainable fisheries management in Manitoba and request that you contact us if the Manitoba Chapter can assist in any way.

Sincerely,



C-Jae Breiter, M.Sc.
Conservation Affairs Committee Co-Chair
Past-President
The Wildlife Society- Manitoba Chapter, Inc.

Encl. [The Wildlife Society Standing Position "The Use of Science in Policy and Management Decisions"]