



The Fishing Industry and the Species at Risk Act

Like many people involved in Canada's commercial fishery, you probably have questions about the country's new *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) and what it means for you. While the specifics vary depending on the fish you catch, there are some important—and helpful—things to understand in general about the Act.

What it's all about

The *Species at Risk Act* was created to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct. It requires Canada to provide for the recovery of species at risk due to human activity, and to manage species of special concern, making sure they don't become endangered or threatened. SARA not only prohibits the killing, harming, harassing, capturing or taking of species at risk, but also makes it illegal to destroy their critical habitats.

Obviously, no single organization or entity can be responsible on its own for achieving the goals of SARA. Governments and stakeholder groups across Canada must all work together. In fact, the Act was designed to encourage such cooperation.

So, while the fishing industry has a role to play in meeting the requirements of SARA—a role that will demand some changes in the ways the industry operates—it won't be acting alone.

Working together

Under SARA, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) must produce recovery strategies and action plans for aquatic species listed as endangered or threatened. Recovery strategies for fish and marine species currently listed under SARA will be developed in close collaboration with the fishing industry and must be completed as soon as 2006.

At DFO, we're working closely with fishers to ensure that the protective measures we develop as part of these strategies and plans are practical, effective, and in keeping with a sound fisheries management approach.

Specific measures could be required for any given fishery. The possibilities include restrictions on bycatch of listed species; modifications of fishing gear; modifications of fishing season openings; fishing area closures; and closures or reductions in fisheries. Obviously, we want to ensure that a sustainable fishing industry can be maintained while meeting the requirements of SARA to protect species at risk. That's why all measures will be developed by DFO in collaboration with the affected fisheries.

How do species get on the list?

Species are designated 'at risk' by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), an independent body of experts that assesses wildlife according to a broad range of scientific data. The federal Cabinet then decides whether those species should be listed under the *Species at Risk Act*. This decision is made after consultations with affected stakeholders and other groups.

Key steps in the process:

1. COSEWIC assesses and designates a species
2. DFO consults with stakeholders and the Minister of the Environment provides advice to Cabinet
3. Cabinet determines whether to list species under SARA
4. DFO updates fisheries management plans to comply with SARA
5. DFO develops recovery strategies with fishing industry and provincial and territorial governments
6. DFO develops compliance program

Species on the list

Whenever a species is considered for listing under SARA, the potential impact on commercial fisheries will always be taken into account. Many of the listed species are caught as bycatch in commercial fisheries. These include leatherback turtles, inner Bay of Fundy Atlantic salmon, and Northern and spotted wolffish. Of note among the species being considered for addition to the SARA list are: the cusk, several populations of Atlantic cod, bocaccio, Sakinaw and Cultus Lake sockeye, and interior Fraser River coho. For a full list, please contact Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Key features of the Act for fishers

The *Species at Risk Act* became law in June 2003. Enforcement begins in June 2004—meaning it will then be illegal to harm or kill species listed under SARA, or to destroy their critical habitats. For certain, commercial fishers need to know what steps they should take to comply with the Act. DFO will make it a priority to communicate those measures before the enforcement period begins.

Some recovery strategies for species listed under the Act won't be finalized until 2006. In the interim, the relevant fisheries management plans will be modified to include new management measures that commercial fishers must put into immediate action. These modifications will be developed in consultation with the fishing industry.

In certain cases, the restriction against harming or killing species at risk may be modified. For example, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans can issue permits under SARA, which allow for a limited amount of bycatch of listed species, so long as the level of bycatch does not jeopardize the survival or recovery of the species.

These permits will be granted only after DFO conducts a scientific assessment to fully understand the impact of commercial fisheries on listed species at risk.

For more information

To find out more about SARA, please visit:

- www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca (click on *Species at Risk* link)
- www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca
- www.SARAreistry.gc.ca

Or contact DFO at:

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