

Island Marine Aquatic Working Group

2023-2026

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



“Unified approach for Indigenous fisheries.”



Message and Photo from the President



From its earliest days the Island Marine Aquatic Working Group (IMAWG) was brought together to inform the Fraser River Salmon Conservation and Management Forum as a collective from the marine approach Nations, formally called the Island Fraser Aquatic Working Group (IFRAWG). The core members of this group knew that it was important to also acknowledge the need for regional understanding and better management of other species of importance besides Fraser River stocks. At the start, IMAWG was an ad-hoc working group, so creating this internal shift or change was challenging. Through negotiations with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), it was determined that IMAWG would meet to discuss management of Salmon, Groundfish, Shellfish, and Herring specifically for a regional approach located around Vancouver Island and Mainland Inlets, or what DFO calls “South Coast”. This change of perspective and focus helped facilitate the creation of a non-profit Society providing the ability to take administrative charge of the organization.

In the early years of this new format, there were plenty of debates and letters written back and forth between DFO and IMAWG. As IMAWG evolved as a non-profit entity, both the members and Board saw the need for change once again. During this time, much effort was put in to promoting skills, communications, and Board training. Once that work was completed, the focus shifted to relationship building and eventually to reconciliation. All through these years of change and growth, IMAWG members and the Board kept a focus on the high-level priorities and concerns of the Vancouver Island and mainland Inlets Nations.

IMAWG is not an Indigenous organization that holds any title or rights, so we cannot be considered a consultation process, nor do we speak for or on behalf of any Nation or organization. We provide a platform for conversation, a communications network for information sharing, and the ability to bring Indigenous Communities/First Nations together from around the Island and mainland inlets to create “one voice” for priorities.

There are many priorities and objectives outside of the fisheries planning process in terms of engagement with DFO. We hope to inform as many Indigenous Communities/First Nations leadership and fisheries staff as possible in the Vancouver Island Region for the needed engagements and discussions. To support Indigenous Communities/First Nations we provide technical support through our biologist and Island Marine Aquatic Technical (IMAT) working group, who have also built a toolbox of resources that are available to use. Our combined effort with the DFO to date has also shown progress in reconciliation and building a better working relationship.

Ongoing engagement and discussions with Indigenous Communities/First Nation chiefs, hereditary chiefs, and leadership will help shape and mold the future goals of IMAWG. All we hope is to continue to be of service and support to develop a unified voice for our region.

Nick Chowdhury (Oomaglaees), President



Mission

“With an unified voice, IMAWG will support and restore all aspects of Indigenous fisheries, by taking an inclusive collaborative approach with all communities within Vancouver Island and Mainland Inlets, extending relations and partners. IMAWG will work strategically to advance Indigenous fisheries in relation to policy, traditional ecological knowledge, modern science, habitat, stewardship, protection and management.”

Vision

“To strengthen and empower a unified approach for Indigenous fisheries, supporting ecosystems and respected rights ensuring food security and health for all communities and the next seven generations.”

Structure

The IMAWG is an incorporated not for profit society that has been in existence since 2008 comprised of our appointed/elected members who with each three-year term develop and follow a supportive strategic plan. IMAWG is a large-scale regional policy/technical organization funded by the DFO program Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM). Our ultimate goal is to create a productive space to bring together Vancouver Island and Mainland Inlet Indigenous organizations for a unified approach to co-management and reconciliation, while empowering rights-based fisheries supported by the most up to date information, technical advice and recommendations. IMAWG advice, recommendations and guidance is shared with all Indigenous people and fisheries organizations, along with identified partners and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

IMAWG is supported by a technical team called the IMAT who uses both historical and modern science to review data and information to provide the best sound advice to Indigenous organizations when engaging in co-management with DFO. IMAWG is managed by a contracted executive director and supported by one full time biologist. The contractors work with IMAWG members, the IMAWG Board of Directors, DFO and other collaborative regional and international Indigenous fishery organizations/ processes.

During inception, IMAWG had been an amalgamation of Indigenous from Vancouver Island and Marine Approach areas; now IMAWG has 15 appointed/elected members made up of all the three language groups on and around Vancouver Island: Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw who systematically follow a set of bylaws, constitution, policies, this strategic plan and the AAROM agreement reporting requirements. IMAWG is managed by a contracted executive director and supported by one full time biologist. The executive director administers the program, while the biologists provide technical advice and recommendations to fisheries data, information, management planning and co-chair IMAT. The contractors work with IMAWG members, the IMAWG Board of Directors, DFO and other regional Indigenous fishery organizations/ processes.

Even though IMAWG focuses on a regional approach to fisheries engagement, IMAWG recognizes that the language group Indigenous organizations may take direction and share information with tribal or



hereditary Chief Councils; for example IMAWG partners with the Council of Ha’wiih where they appoint the five Nuu-chah-nulth members to IMAWG and we are invited guests to their meetings. Ultimately it’s the Indigenous communities themselves IMAWG takes full direction from, and will always remain in service to whatever systems those communities have in place.

Purpose

“To facilitate Tier One and Two forums for Indigenous to exchange and analyze information on fisheries management, build a unified voice, and to support bilateral discussions between Indigenous and Government.”

The IMAWG is an incorporated not for profit society that has been in existence since 2008. Our main purpose is to facilitate regional wide fisheries management meetings between both Indigenous and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to discuss all fisheries matters of interest. We are funded by the DFO program AAROM. Our ultimate purpose is to create a space for engagement for a unified approach to co-management, while empowering Indigenous within their local fisheries supported by the most up to date information, technical and policy advice with recommendations. IMAWG is supported by a technical team called the IMAT who uses both historical and modern science to review data and information to provide the best sound advice to Indigenous organizations when engaging in co-management with DFO. It’s important to understand that IMAWG is not a mandated, rights holding organization or a decision-making body, therefore does not replace fiduciary bilateral consultations between Indigenous groups and the Government; we are here to support those discussions with shared information and advice.



IMAWG not only helps lead regional based engagements, but we also attend other AAROM processes working closely with other Indigenous organizations in BC to collaborate together in support of regional processes. These BC wide engagements help build unity and strengthen our approach when working with provincial and federal governments. IMAWG reports back not only to the 15 delegates, but to all Island Indigenous organizations to ensure adequate information is received by all to assist in local management processes. Any Indigenous is welcome at IMAWG engagements; this unity is the backbone of our organization.



Within the last five years, IMAWG has begun to support the Ministerial mandate of reconciliation and expanded the work to include annual reconciliation workshops with DFO, met with DFO leadership to discuss relationship progress, address any concerns and navigate collaboration where required, and regularly following up post DFO engagements to go over all meeting actions and advice to progress together on commitments. There is no “end-date” on reconciliation; for IMAWG it is a process where we learn to build trust and improve on supporting Indigenous peoples and their fisheries.

IMAWG continues to strive to improve operations and through this 2020-2023 strategic plan they hope to build regional and local partnerships, enhance communications with local communities, share information, increase engagement with FNFC delegates, build on the relationship with DFO and seek out long term sustainable funding that will ensure a consistent service of business.

IMAWG Roles and Responsibilities

Members (Serve a Three Year Term) Kwakwaka'wakw(5) Coast Salish (5) Nuuchahnulth (5)

- Five members from the three language groups (Kwakwaka'wakw, Coast Salish and Nuuchahnulth); appointed and/or elected by their regions.
- Attend all meetings and workshops of IMAWG.
- Discuss priorities and business to be addressed at scheduled meetings to provide advice, support, guidance and collective feedback.
- Observe the modern and traditional meeting procedures.
- Serve on other committees or fishery processes and report back to IMAWG.

Appoints

Directors (Serve a Three Year Term) Kwakwaka'wakw (2) Coast Salish (2) Nuuchahnulth (2)

- Six directors, two per language group, chosen by each of the members.
- Board appoints a President/Chair, Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer.
- Board exercises all the powers of the Society.
- Board hires and monitors the work of staff and contractors.
- Board reports on their activities to the members.

Executive Director

The Executive Director provides function for the IMAWG to operate and manage the Society as directed by of the Board of Directors, Strategic Plan, by-laws and constitutions, human resources and finance policies and coordinating activities of IMAWG. They provide advice, guidance and direction on both fisheries and larger scale policy matters.

Biologists

Scientific advisors who undertake activities supporting science-based decision-making for First Nations and community engagement, and providing professional advice within the area of fisheries expertise. They identify needs, conduct research, participate in initiatives, and prepare related communication materials.



Evolution Timeline of the Organization

2008

Started as Island Fraser River and Approach Working Group (IFRAWG)



Funded under other A-Tlegay Fisheries Society supporting Vancouver Island Fraser River Engagement.



Changed name to Island Marine Aquatic Working Group.

PICFI funding for biologists.



Council of Ha'wiih Partnership

First Nations Fisheries Council Partnership



Management Action Tracker

Constitution and Bylaws created



Annual planning started

Started Island Specific Tier One and Two

2011

Species: salmon, crab, clam, herring, prawn and halibut with participation in "Roadmap".

2012

Incorporation as a Society

Board of Directors



First Strategic Plan

Hired two P/T biologists



Island Marine Aquatic Technical Working Group created



Funded under Qualicum and Mama'omas Limited Partnership



Supported the Fraser Salmon Management Council transition



Regional Engagement with BC Indigenous Organizations

2014

Social Media and Newsletters

Professional meeting minutes

2015

PICFI funding removed

Annual Cultural Relationship Workshop with DFO started

IMAWG President and DFO Area Director Quarterly Meetings



Annual Data Management Workshop started

Funding independent; supported by Board of Directors and Accounting Team



Annual Governance Workshop with DFO started

Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance partnership

Creation of Operational Guidelines with DFO



Action Planning Meetings (Post Tier Two) started

Meeting report cards started



Access and Allocation Framework Process to Engage to DFO

Annual Reconciliation Workshop

Develop of a new Strategic Plan



Increased Continuity of IMAWG Members

Tier Three participation as Observer

2019

Pacific Salmon Commission, Fraser River Technical as Observer

Action Planning Summaries to replace redundant Tier letter process

2021

Negotiated Funding for Members Professional Services



Pivot to Online Engagements due to COVID-19



Granted a BCSRIF for Vancouver Island Salmon Committee



Field Equipment Rental Program for Indigenous organizations



Providing Advice to AAROMs on Improved Collaboration



Increasing Communication through Social Media

2023

Changing DFO Engagement Structure to Focus on Technical Building

Species Conservation and Management

1. Identifying species and processes priorities to IMAWG members.
2. Providing technical and policy engagement and analysis support for Island Indigenous organizations.
3. Participating in scientific reviews.
4. Ongoing collection, review, and advice of applicable data, information and any other supporting information.
5. Involvement in new and ongoing federally implemented management processes where feedback and advice is requested.
6. Ensuring conservation based on Section 35.1 and related legal obligations is respected.
7. Collecting and incorporating indigenous advice, direction, considerations and knowledge.
8. Review and providing guidance and advice on current and newly formed policies.
9. Researching fisheries indigenous access opportunities.
10. Accessing and engaging in holistic species rebuilding processes.



Engagement and Communication

1. Ensuring that Indigenous involvement in fisheries engagements are made available for contribution, feedback, direction and advice; including new emerging processes.
2. Providing safe, accessible, consistent, joint prioritized, solution orientated and well supported engagements.
3. Adequately resourced workshops that are based in Truth and Reconciliation.
4. Empowering a unified voice and approach between IMAWG and Vancouver Island Indigenous organizations.
5. Bolstering technical and tier one engagements and discussions.
6. Navigating tier two engagements that are specially requested and topic directed by IMAWG Members or DFO.
7. Providing regular updates and information, with supporting materials through multiple media avenues to IMAWG members, partners and Island Indigenous organizations.
8. Engaging communicate through an IMAWG Newsletter to Indigenous organizations Communications Staff and Tier Engagement
9. Keeping Indigenous organizations updated through Briefing Notes for Chiefs.

Partnerships

1. Ensuring partnerships between IMAWG and others are functioning, fully engaged, and transparent.
2. Supporting an empowered and unified voice between IMAWG and Vancouver Island Indigenous organizations.
3. Collaborating on AAROM partnerships to increase strength and technical capacity.
4. Building a high-level functioning standard of business between IMAWG, DFO Aboriginal Affairs Advisor, and DFO Area Director.
5. Working towards active reconciliation through a DFO/IMAWG Relationship Workshops

Capacity

1. Securing own source revenue for increased capacity.
2. Maintaining involvement with AAROM National commitments to champion for increased resources to adequately fund engagement and community support.
3. Engaging in public outreach on Indigenous fisheries to build awareness and allies.
4. Maintain and building a usable tracking system of priorities and recommendations.
5. Mentorship for succession planning.
6. Creating a communication strategy.

Altering the Way We Engage to Increase Capacity and Improve Action

During the 2022 Strategic Planning for IMAWG Members; the group made a progressive decision to move away from extensive Tier Two Engagement to focus on bolstering technical engagement and giving more time for Indigenous only meetings. Members have recognized that not only are the Tier One meetings beneficial for deeper understanding of fisheries and the systems in place that support conservation and management, but it also allows to invest more into technical capacity which the Indigenous organizations are getting more value and benefit from. IMAT is an inclusive process where Indigenous technicians come together to analyze information, invite DFO science, stock assessment and managers, and then prepare advice for Indigenous organizations at Tier One. IMAT meetings are spoken highly of by DFO and Indigenous organizations and make way for a collaborative process where the focus is understanding and action.

Over the years IMAWG members have observed that Tier Two engagements are centered around information out (sometimes repetitive through multiple meetings), limited DFO staff capacity, and occasionally unproductive due to relationship limitations. Over the last few year DFO staff have been drawn thin due to increased demands and lack of capacity within their organization. They too were observing the same results of Tier Two. However, there was extremely positive feedback provided on the time spent in Tier One understanding, strategizing, and providing advice, and the productivity of IMAT. The amount of technical advice and direction that IMAWG has been providing to both DFO and Indigenous organizations is important and needed to bolster that style of engagement. This technical capacity in both science and policy is what supports Indigenous organizations in both their local management and/or bilaterals with DFO. It also provides a support system for Indigenous organizations that may not have the technical capacity they need; hence utilizing IMAWG's support.



IMAWG Members requested that Tier Two engagements remain as Action Planning Meetings between IMAWG staff and specific DFO managers whereas IMAWG would use the Action Tables to provide advice, set tasks and get commitments from DFO. Most importantly, that we give IMAT the support they need to increase their engagements, foster productive outputs, and provide the advice at Tier One. The group agreed that specific Tier Two meetings may still need to happen when it was required or requested by either party. These Tier Two would specifically be IMAWG staff and specified DFO managers that have the ability and authority to discuss the topics identified. DFO, when presented with this change, felt it was a positive way forward, whereas DFO science and local manager could meet at IMAT, while still having those productive Action Planning meetings where they could set tasks with IMAWG therefore still committing to the process.



Aboriginal Rights - Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

“Aboriginal rights refer to practices, traditions and customs that distinguish the unique culture of each First Nation and were practiced prior to European contact. These are rights that Aboriginal peoples of Canada hold as a result of their ancestors’ longstanding use and occupancy of the land. The rights to hunt, trap and fish on ancestral lands are examples of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal rights are protected under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The Government of Canada has a constitutional duty to consult Indigenous peoples when it considers measures that might adversely impact their potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights. This has been consistently confirmed by the Courts.”

IMAWG Legal Foundation: Constitution Act, 1982 Section 35, Court Decisions and UNDRIP

“Section 35 is the part of the Constitution Act that recognizes and affirms Aboriginal rights. The Canadian government did not initially plan to include Aboriginal rights so extensively within the Constitution when the Act was being redrafted in the early 1980s. Early drafts and discussions during the patriation of the Canadian Constitution did not include any recognition of those existing rights and relationships, but through campaigns and demonstrations, Aboriginal groups in Canada successfully fought to have their rights enshrined and protected.

35. (1) *The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.*
- (2) *In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.*
- (3) *For greater certainty, in subsection (1) “treaty rights” includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.*
- (4) *Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.*

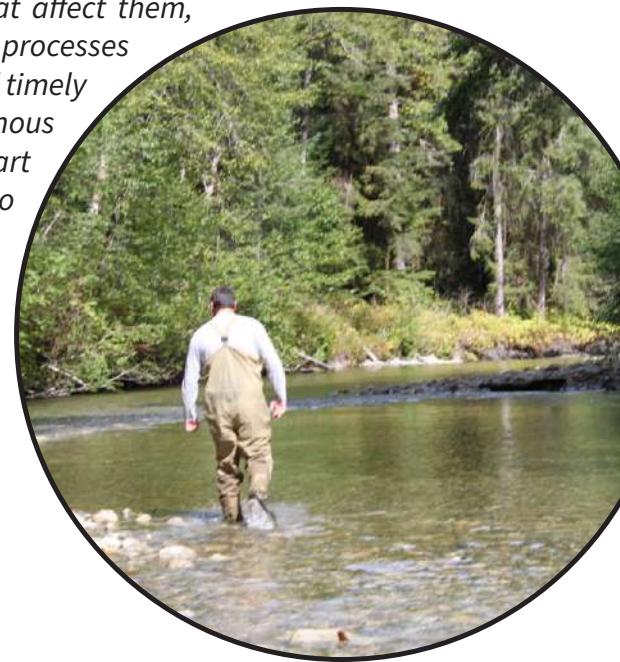
Section 35 of The Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal rights, but does not define them. What Aboriginal rights include has been the topic of much debate and discussion, and they have been defined over time through Supreme Court cases such as *R. v. Calder* and *R. v. Sparrow*. **Aboriginal rights have been interpreted to include a range of cultural, social, political, and economic rights including the right to land, as well as to fish, to hunt, to practice one's own culture, and to establish treaties.**



The right to fish for food, social and ceremonial (FSC) purposes is protected under Section 35 of the Constitution. It is a collective right, not an individual one. Designated Indigenous harvesters can catch what is needed for themselves and/or their community for FSC purposes.

The *Sparrow* decision was an important decision of the Supreme Court of Canada concerning the application of Aboriginal rights under Section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. The Court held that Aboriginal rights, such as fishing, that were in existence in 1982 are protected under the Constitution of Canada cannot be infringed without justification on account of the government's fiduciary duty to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The *Marshall* decision is a landmark decision in Canada that affirmed First Nations' treaty right to fish, hunt, and gather in pursuit of a moderate livelihood. Supreme Court also ruled in *Ahousaht Nation v. Canada*, concluded that five Nuu-chah-nulth plaintiffs have aboriginal rights to fish in their traditional territories and sell that fish into the commercial marketplace.”

On June 21, 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act received Royal Assent and immediately came into force. This legislation advances the implementation of the Declaration as a key step in renewing the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. References to “free, prior and informed consent” (FPIC) are found throughout the Declaration. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples and ensuring that there is effective and meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples in decisions that affect them, their communities and territories. More specifically, FPIC describes processes that are free from manipulation or coercion, informed by adequate and timely information, and occur sufficiently prior to a decision so that Indigenous rights and interests can be incorporated or addressed effectively as part of the decision-making process - all as part of meaningfully aiming to secure the consent of affected Indigenous peoples.”



Partners



**First Nations
Fisheries Council**
of British Columbia



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada



The Island Marine Aquatic Working Group (IMAWG) is made up of 15 member First Nations from the three language areas on Vancouver Island: Coast Salish, Nuuchah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw. These areas encompass all First Nations on Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland and Central Coast (up to and including Kitasoo).

"To strengthen and empower a unified approach for Indigenous fisheries, supporting ecosystems and respected rights ensuring food security and health for all communities and the next seven generations."

