

# ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



*Ontario Conservation Centre*

P.O. Box 2800, 4601 Guthrie Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8L5  
Phone: (705) 748.6324 • Fax: (705) 748.9577 • Visit: [www.ofah.org](http://www.ofah.org) • Email: [ofah@ofah.org](mailto:ofah@ofah.org)

OFAH FILE: 420FMZC/452  
December 21, 2017

Ms. Emily Gryck  
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, South Tower  
300 Water Street  
Peterborough, Ontario  
K9J 3C7

Dear Ms. Gryck:

Subject: Stakeholder Listening Session Workbook – OFAH Feedback

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest non-profit, conservation-based organization representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 740 member clubs. The OFAH has a devoted Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC) comprised of local experts, academics, and avid anglers throughout the province. Each member brings to the table unique ideas and viewpoints, as well as having considerable Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) council experience.

To assist in supplying relevant feedback and input into the fisheries management planning process for FMZ 16, the OFAH reached out to the committee for real-world insight from actual resource users. The following is an amalgamation of responses to the questions contained in the Stakeholder Listening Session Workbook.

## **Use and Importance of the Fishery**

### ***I. How do you use the fishery in FMZ 16?***

It is widely understood that many of the fisheries contained within FMZ 16 are premier world-class resources, but due to direct and indirect anthropogenic influences, require constant assessment and adaptive management.

A wide variety of fish in the zone are harvested for consumption by recreational anglers and commercial fishers including Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Angling methods and philosophies are as diverse as the aquatic environments found within the zone: from fly and float fishing, catfishing, from shore to vessel, to guided outfitters, there are opportunities for a number of Ontario's gamefish species.

FAC members have noted they take part in egg collections for salmonid species such as Rainbow Trout and Chinook Salmon. Members and volunteers alike use the fishery as a means to support hatchery programs and subsequently stocking; an important management tool to facilitate opportunities and supplement fisheries where needed. The non-material benefits of fishing as a healthy recreational activity was also identified and is a fundamental reason why most, if not all users partake in angling.

Live bait is commonly used. Its procurement and sales have contributed some of the most significant quantities of bait and revenue in the province. The management of bait has become complex due to increasing environmental pressures with respect to introductions of alien species and pathogens that threaten the health of fisheries. The OFAH is optimistic that the Strategic Policy for Bait Management in Ontario remains reasonably permissive, while simultaneously preventing potential negative impacts associated with bait and its movement.

Entrepreneurs have made marinas and ports their livelihood, as well as boating and marine equipment sales. Also, fishing tournaments and derbies are popular in Zone 16 and are economic assets to the region.

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***II. What aspects of the fishery are most important to you?***

Research and environmental monitoring are important aspects of the fishery. It is imperative that fisheries continue to be assessed and evaluated using innovative research networks such as the Great Lakes Acoustic Telemetry Observation System. Further expansion to the tributaries of FMZ 16 should be pursued. Programs like these improve our understanding of fish behaviour and help inform fisheries managers in their decision-making processes. Data collection and inventory assist in the understanding of the status of fisheries, while enabling good planning and the implementation of action items.

Relying on sound science to support fisheries activities is critical, but an inclusive and participatory approach to research planning, legislation and policy are factors that also need to be considered. Making improvements through meetings, initiatives and conservation actions such as FMZ Councils, Community Hatchery Programs and watershed management plans (e.g. the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan [GRFMP]). For these to be successful, knowledge and perspectives should be incorporated from a diverse range of fisheries stakeholders, to provide input and influence fisheries management in a constructive way.

An important aspect of the fishery identified by the OFAH FAC is the interconnectedness of the watersheds to the Great Lakes. There is a need to understand aquatic ecosystem structure, function and connectivity from a landscape scale, in order to develop or mitigate impacts and to achieve healthy and sustainable fisheries. The coordination and implementation of planning can only be achieved when considering all FMZs involved including zones 13, 14, 19, 20 and 16.

Adequate long-term funding is an important aspect of the fishery. Financial resources are the backbone in supporting fisheries management, protection, restoration and recovery of fish communities and their ecosystems. The consolidation and prioritization of limited interagency resources and small initiative funds will help modernize and streamline efficiencies and increase overall available funding. Planning is good, but its effectiveness will be limited without sufficient resources to fund action in the priority areas identified through planning exercises.

Integration with other agencies is an important consideration when discussing accessibility. In a climate where municipalities, townships and cities are often resorting to bylaws to curb angler access, strategies and partnerships have to be fostered to do the opposite (i.e. promote the benefits of access to fishing at the community level). Currently, the Ontario government is underperforming in the identification, enhancement and increase of access to fishing spaces. With 6.5 million inhabitants and many large urban populations in FMZ 16, the importance of accessibility and urban fishing strategies is magnified.

**State of the Fishery Today**

***I. What would you say are the key issues or factors affecting the state of the fishery in FMZ 16?***

The FAC identified inconsistencies within fisheries and watershed management planning processes. For example, the GRFMP seems to be functioning and operating as designed, whereas the FMP for the Thames River has yet to be completed and implemented. Zone-wide consistency in management goals and objectives needs to be on the forefront of the planning process.

Non-point sources of phosphorus loadings from rural, agricultural and urban areas are negatively impacting, not only the state of the fishery in FMZ 16, but the neighbouring Great Lakes. Ontario's voluntary programs designed to address phosphorus inputs have largely been unsuccessful and unevaluated. Redesigned financial, regulatory and land use planning tools are paramount in reducing nutrients associated with harmful algal blooms and low oxygen which threaten fish and aquatic ecosystems. Networking and collaborative partnerships with all levels of government (including the US), Indigenous communities, Conservation Authorities, non-government organizations, and the public, will assist in achieving targets as described in the Canada-Ontario Lake Erie Action Plan.

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The relationship between the Great Lakes and the watersheds that drain into these features has been identified as an important aspect of the fishery. There is a need to administratively connect the Great Lakes with watershed planning, and acknowledge the ecological interface that fish rely on to carry out their life processes. To do so, agency coordination of responsibilities, funding priorities and planned objectives needs to be improved, which includes the identification and removal of obsolete dams/barriers.

Other concerns affecting the state of the fishery in FMZ 16 include aquatic invasive species (AIS). Invading species are a growing environmental and economic threat, whose introductions and/or spread put fish and their habitats at risk. There should be greater emphasis on the prevention of unauthorized introductions, as well as improving the understanding of cause and effect relationships and responses to stresses. This includes addressing the need for climate change adaptation; forecasting and planning in advance to assist in the challenges climate change may present.

***II. Thinking about how the fishery is managed now in FMZ 16, what is working well? What could be improved?***

In 2008, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) initiated the Broad-scale Monitoring program for inland lakes to improve resource managers' understanding of the status and trends of these systems. A similar landscape-based model for rivers and streams has yet to be introduced. FMZ 16 features many large rivers, and it is absolutely necessary that standardized data collection methods be implemented to facilitate, guide and direct the planning process and future fisheries management decisions. For the interim, strategic partnerships will be required and the MNRF will need to rely on other organizations (e.g. Conservation Authorities) to fill their information gaps.

Increased enforcement and compliance should be prioritized if improvements to angling access are desired. Further progress is needed with respect to outreach, education, training, inspections and prosecutions. Relationships with municipalities, towns, cities, etc., need to be built upon and fostered to relabel the bad reputation the angling community is being branded with.

Part of the MNRF's *mission* statement is to provide leadership in the restoration of fish communities and their supporting ecosystems. Involvement in this regard should be improved upon and prioritized for the restoration, recovery and rehabilitation of degraded fish populations and their habitats. Efforts should focus on sensitive fish populations such as Brook Trout; however, this may be difficult in the absence of a provincial policy and/or management strategy for this species.

The Listening Sessions and partnering of stakeholders in the planning process for FMZ 16 is an important step towards improving the conservation management of fisheries. The International Joint Commission, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Remedial Action Plans, and other similar initiatives are functioning well in terms of focus and transparency. It will be important that the FMZ 16 management planning process aligns with other binational, national and provincial management objectives, and does not result in unnecessary duplication with existing efforts.

**Towards a Fisheries Management Plan**

***I. What are the most important issues the plan needs to address?***

Many important issues the plan needs to address have been discussed, including the following: improving enforcement; increasing access; climate change; invasive species; Broad-scale Monitoring for rivers and streams; Brook Trout management; connecting watersheds to the Great Lakes (e.g. removing unnecessary barriers); phosphate reductions and water quality; improved funding and financial resources; partnerships and networking; science and environmental monitoring; and restoration.

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In addition to these important issues, the fisheries management planning process should also recognize the need to strategically divide FMZ 16 to improve efficiencies, streamline process and harmonize information. For example, FMZ 20 is geographically separated into two east and west zones, as well as two councils. The FAC suggested the subdivision of FMZ 16 align more with the boundaries of OFAH Zones G, H, and J (<https://www.ofah.org/about-us/ofah-zones/>). This would facilitate, help target, and focus efforts on significant tributaries and priority watersheds within these zones. Council size has also been identified as a possible issue; if too large, it may be difficult to arrive at a consensus.

**II. What opportunities do you see for better fisheries management in FMZ 16?**

Many opportunities exist for better fisheries management in FMZ 16, such as meaningful public input through a carefully selected council. The selection of its members cannot involve independent representation or personal agendas; rather, members who are willing to focus on goal-oriented plans to improve fish habitat, the environment and the health of all FMZ 16 fisheries.

Programs should be implemented to educate and recruit landowners and farmers in improving land use practices, as well as on-the-ground participation to enhance, rehabilitate and restore waterbodies. Fostering landowner trust and networking additional voluntary access locations should be explored.

**Other Feedback or Advice**

**I. Do you have any other feedback or advice for the project team?**

The MNR identified two main purposes of the Ontario's Provincial Fish Strategy: 1) to improve conservation management of fisheries and ecosystems; and 2) to promote, facilitate and encourage fishing. These principles require mechanisms to measure performance and track the progress of goals and objectives outlined in the FMP.

Internal communication should be enhanced to avoid disconnect between provincial policies, programs and activities, and the staff tasked with these directives. The MNR should work towards streamlining and integrating with other agency approvals to improve efficiencies. Approvals and permits should be expedited for activities involved in the enhancement, restoration and rehabilitation of fish habitat.

The information provided in this document should not be considered exhaustive. As mentioned, much of the feedback was gathered from the OFAH FAC and expanded upon by OFAH staff. Supporting documents included the Ontario's Provincial Fish Strategy: Fish for the Future, the Environmental Protection Report (2017); the Canada-Ontario Lake Erie Action Plan; and the Strategic Policy for Bait Management in Ontario (2017).

The OFAH hopes the input assists in the guidance of the fisheries management planning process for FMZ 16. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at 705-748-6324 ext. 208, or by email at [adam\\_weir@ofah.org](mailto:adam_weir@ofah.org).

Yours in Conservation,



Adam Weir  
Fisheries Biologist

AW/jb

cc: OFAH Board of Directors  
OFAH Fisheries Advisory Committee  
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director  
Matt DeMille, OFAH Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services