

# ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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)



*Ontario Conservation Centre*

OFAH FILE: 420D/452

August 23, 2023

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
300 Water Street  
5th Floor, North Tower  
Peterborough, Ontario  
K9J 3C7

RE: Proposed amendments to Ontario Regulation 664/98 Fish Licensing (O. Reg. 664/98) to enable the transport of preserved bait and the temporary movement of bait into and out of Bait Management Zones

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. Although we appreciate that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has listened to some of our recommendations for amending Ontario's bait management strategy, commercial harvesters and distributors are still not being actively and effectively managed. While the OFAH and the angling community support a strong, healthy bait industry in Ontario, we also recognize this continues to put our fisheries resources at risk. In our response, we provide feedback on the proposed regulatory amendments and urge the MNRF to take significant action at the commercial level.

The first part of the proposal involves a regulatory change that would enable the transport of preserved baitfish and leeches ("bait") across Bait Management Zone (BMZ) boundaries. Preserved bait wouldn't have the same movement restrictions as live or dead bait and could be moved into, out of, and across BMZs.

This amendment comes on the heels of OFAH's April 2023 letter to Minister Graydon Smith with a slight variation to allow for movement of preserved bait compared to our recommendation that included dead bait. While we recognize dead bait poses a greater ecological risk compared to preserved bait, an even greater threat to Ontario's fisheries is illegal bait bucket dumping as this activity has the potential to introduce not only harmful pathogens but non-target species as well. Regardless, whether dead or preserved, enabling the transport of bait home at the end of the day will help reduce bait bucket dumping events as well as avoid wastage of a valued resource. As such, we support this amendment.

However, the OFAH would not be supportive of implementing requirements for extended curing periods (e.g., days, weeks) before the bait can be moved as this would be counterproductive to the reasons for allowing the movement of preserved bait (i.e., reduce illegal bait bucket dumping events, avoid resource wastage). We recommend scoping the proposal to allow for same-day preservation of bait prior to transport using table/pickling salt or other known treatments that inactivate, for example, viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (e.g., borax, mineral oil, isopropyl alcohol, dehydration) (Phelps et al. 2013). The treatment medium must be simple to apply and be effective in the most extreme conditions (i.e., ice fishing situations). That said, if the MNRF intends to land on permitting a single preservation method/medium to avoid any ambiguity, the most practical, widely used, accessible, and possibly enforceable preservative is table/pickling salt.

The Ministry should consider how the receipt system and two-week expiration period for bait will change within the context of the proposed amendments. From our perspective, the act of preserving bait should make receipts and the expiration period become redundant and unnecessary. An educational component to preserving bait would be an added benefit (e.g., how to preserve, how much preservative, best practices, enforcement expectations, etc.) and could be done through social media outlets, Fish ON-Line, Fishing Regulations Summary, as well as OFAH's communication networks.

The second part of the proposal involves allowing temporary transport of live and dead bait out of and into a BMZ so that they can be used in the BMZ they were acquired in. From our understanding, this amendment is meant to address situations in the province where the new bait rules are not functioning as intended and would only apply to short-term (same day) movement. With the knowledge that tracking bait movement across BMZ boundaries is not possible, we wonder if the Ministry considered any unanticipated consequences that people could take advantage of? Does this amendment impact the enforceability of the bait rules? Would the receipt system and two-week expiry apply to these situations?

It is concerning that well over a decade was put towards the bait management file and the development of its policies; however, in less than a year, the Ministry is already considering amending the rules. This suggests that the bait management strategy is not effectively conserving Ontario's fisheries. Moreover, these concerns are exacerbated by the government's reluctance to address the significant threats posed by lax regulations at the commercial level.

Again, we strongly encourage the MNRF to rethink their approach to BMZ regulations and urge decision makers to refocus management strategies towards commercial bait operations and within the Ministry using the following strategies:

1. Increase MNRF capacity, monitoring, and enforcement of the new bait rules.
2. Enhance the monitoring and oversight of commercial bait harvesters and distributors including routine follow-up (i.e., in-person audits and inspections) with appropriate checks, balances, and penalties in place.
3. Prioritize management of higher-risk commercial pathways or activities (i.e., site collection, transport, storage locations, retailers/distributors).
4. Allow inspections of harvester storage locations to detect unwanted species and carry out appropriate enforcement actions before non-native organisms are distributed to anglers.
5. Include inspections as a licence condition for commercial harvesters before bait holdings can be moved to a retail outlet (i.e., requiring baitfish to be held on-site until inspected, where appropriate).
6. Appoint regulatory inspectors to monitor and promote compliance to the regulations in the commercial bait sector.
7. To address the inspection limitations of the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, and to allow for effective inspections, require all vehicles used in the movement of commercial bait holdings to be marked with a unique identifier and to display a placard whenever there is bait on-board the vehicle.
8. Create a vector-specific task force to carry out inspection blitzes at the BMZ-level and report back to enforcement branch.
9. Track and report on the results of all aspects of the bait management strategy on an annual basis (i.e., number of harvesters, dealers, and angler inspections, rate of detected non-compliance).

For anglers, we see education, outreach, and awareness training using the Fish and Wildlife Licensing Service and other outlets as more effective strategies for improving knowledge and understanding of and compliance with Ontario's fishing regulations. Recreational boaters, hunters, and trappers all have some level of training to participate in their respective activity, yet fishing essentially has no entry-level requirements.

A frequently encountered theme experienced across Ontario is a lack of understanding of our complex fishing rules and regulations. This becomes an even greater challenge for new Canadians and people whose first language may not be English. The province needs to be more accessible by breaking down these barriers which will in turn improve the conservation of fisheries but also participation in angling and funding of Ontario's Fish and Wildlife Special Purpose Account.

The OFAH appreciates the Ministry's consideration and would be glad to collaborate on a new approach to Ontario's Sustainable Bait Management Strategy including amendments to the provisions on the personal harvest of bait.

Yours in Conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Weir', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Weir  
Fisheries Biologist

AW/jb

cc: OFAH Board of Directors  
OFAH Fisheries Advisory Committee  
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director  
Matt DeMille, OFAH Director, Policy & Programs  
Mark Ryckman, OFAH Manager, Policy  
Chris Robinson, OFAH Manager, Programs  
OFAH Policy & Programs Staff

References

Phelps NBD, Goodwin AE, Marecaux E, Goyal SM. 2013. Comparison of treatments to inactivate viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV-IVb) in frozen baitfish. Diseases of Aquatic Organisms. Vol. 102: 211–216.