

Fisheries and Oceans Canada failed to lead an integrated approach to sustaining marine resources

Ottawa, 10 June 2025—A report released today by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Jerry V. DeMarco, on behalf of the Auditor General of Canada concludes that Fisheries and Oceans Canada made little progress over nearly 3 decades in leading an integrated approach to sustaining marine resources in the Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic oceans.

Climate change and increasing human activity in the oceans are degrading the health of marine ecosystems, threatening biodiversity across the planet. The Oceans Act, which came into force in 1997, sets out the principle of an integrated approach to managing Canada's oceans. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has the lead role in coordinating this whole-of-government approach that balances environmental conservation with the sustainable use of marine resources.

The audit found that while the department worked with partners in 5 priority regions to develop ocean management plans, these were abstract and did not lead to concrete actions. More recently, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has led the development of marine spatial planning, a new integrated planning process designed to coordinate when and where human activities should take place in the oceans. The audit noted that the department has made little headway in developing these new plans.

"Integrated ocean planning became part of federal law nearly 3 decades ago; Canadians are still waiting for it to be implemented," Mr. DeMarco said. "In the face of climate change and competing interests, it is more important than ever that Fisheries and Oceans Canada deliver on its leadership responsibilities."

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The 2025 Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Integrated Oceans Management, is available on the Office of the Auditor General of Canada website.

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