



Canada's Whalesafe Fishing Gear Strategy

Canada's Whalesafe Fishing Gear Strategy provides a process to develop and support the implementation of fishing gear measures to reduce the risk of harm to whales from entanglement, in collaboration with harvesters and other partners. [Whalesafe fishing gear](#) (WSG) includes gear designed to prevent whale entanglements in fishing lines, such as on-demand gear, and gear configured to reduce harm if entanglement occur, such as low breaking-strength gear.

Canada's whalesafe fishing gear goal: Implement whalesafe gear in fisheries across Canada to reduce whale entanglements while supporting sustainable modern fisheries that coexist with healthy whale species and populations.

What Does This Mean For Canadian Fish Harvesters?

Over the next 5 years, DFO will work with harvesters on activities to support whalesafe fishing gear implementation. This work will improve our understanding on how whales get entangled in fishing gear and the best ways to address the issue, while recognizing that fisheries have different requirements and need safe and effective solutions. Anticipated benefits are solutions that both protect whales, and support fisheries. These benefits will reinforce Canada's status as a leader in sustainable and competitive seafood.

Objective 1: DFO to develop the policies, processes and legal instruments needed to support the responsible use of whalesafe fishing gear in Canadian fisheries, in close collaboration with fish harvester and experts

- We're working on plans, policies and tools to help WSG become a part of how we manage fishing.
- To do this, we'll keep talking with harvesters, First Nations, Indigenous groups and other experts through meetings and advisory groups to support the implementation of WSG in fisheries across Canada.
- This includes developing policies and processes to test and approve whalesafe gear technologies for use in Canada, so harvester and manufacturers have the information they need.

Objective 2: Assess fisheries across Canada to identify those with a high risk of whale interaction and entanglement

- Not all fisheries interact with whales in the same way. We are using the best available science to assess whale entanglement risk in fisheries across Canada. In the near term, DFO will prioritize assessing risk to endangered North Atlantic right whales in Eastern Canada, before expanding to other whales and fisheries.
- DFO will work with harvesters and other partners and stakeholders to incorporate their knowledge into risk-informed decision making.

Objective 3: Continue to address knowledge gaps on the implementation of whalesafe gear in Canadian fisheries

- Canadian harvesters and manufacturers are leading the way to develop and test WSG in fisheries.
- Research and gear trials will continue to fill knowledge gaps and find safe and effective ways to use WSG in fisheries across Canada. This helps us find the right solutions that work for harvesters as well as whales.
- As we learn more about how WSG is best used in fishery operations and to protect whales, informed by harvester expertise and feedback, we can make adjustments to ensure measures are effective.



Objective 4: Identify management areas that present a high risk of entanglement to enable testing and support implementation of on-demand gear where appropriate

- On-demand gear is a whale entanglement prevention tool because when used, there are no vertical lines in the water, like fishery closures. It provides the opportunity for harvesters to safely fish when whales are present, supporting productive fisheries.
- DFO will work with harvesters, Indigenous groups, and other partners to develop and enable on-demand gear pilots and areas. Working together, pilots help us figure out the best ways to manage on-demand gear fishing without disrupting other fishing activity.
- On-demand gear pilot areas will be developed collaboratively with harvesters, in areas and fisheries where entanglement risk is high and where the technology has been demonstrated to be operationally effective.
- **DFO will not impose on-demand gear on fish harvesters where viable alternative options exist or exclude conventional harvesters from areas where entanglement risk is low.**

Objective 5: Test and Implement other gear modifications, devices or systems to prevent and alleviate whale entanglement harm

- DFO understands that current on-demand gear technology may be incompatible with some fisheries at this time, such as fisheries using smaller vessels. Other gear modifications and solutions are available and may be effective at addressing entanglement risk.
- DFO will work with harvesters and others to develop a range of other WSG solutions for testing and implementation in fisheries where needed and appropriate, e.g. low breaking strength gear and trawling up.
- All WSG options will be considered on a fishery-by-fishery basis, in a way that reflects their relative entanglement risk and the operational needs of their fisheries. WSG solutions in fisheries will be monitored over time through engagement of harvesters and other experts to track effectiveness and best practices.

The Path Forward: Timeline for the Next 5 years



By **2030**, the identification, implementation and monitoring of fishing gear innovations or configurations will be integrated into Canada's regular fisheries management tools and processes.

Contact Us:

Successful implementation of the strategy depends on collaboration with harvesters, First Nations and Indigenous organizations, the fishing industry, whale and gear experts, and provincial and territorial governments. Please reach out with any feedback or questions you may have at: DFO.WSGStrategy-StrategieESB.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.