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Study identifies factors affecting fishery health in Canada, offers management suggestions

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Healthier fish stocks linked to certain fishery management regions, more selective fishing gears, certification and higher value

A new study shows that certain factors – such as management region, fishing gear, “sustainable seafood” eco-certification and cooperation among fishers – are key to healthier fish stocks in Canada, offering insights for improved fisheries management.

Currently, however, only 29 percent of Canadian fish stocks are at healthy levels of abundance, while 17 percent are in the “critical zone.” If Canada is to meet its commitment to manage all marine life sustainably by 2025, it needs an improved understanding of effective strategies for managing fisheries more sustainably.

Researchers at Dalhousie University, Carleton University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) took a unique approach to determine what drives fisheries health in Canada by looking at positive outliers, or stocks doing better than expected. They wanted to understand what institutional, economic



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and social factors play the biggest role in affecting fish stock health and how this information could be used to help transform stocks that are depleted.

Scientists, led by post-doctoral fellow Laurene Schiller of Dalhousie, analyzed all 230 commercial stocks in Canada to first see what drives overall stock health. Published in ***Fish and Fisheries*** (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/faf.12815>), the findings indicate that healthier fish stocks were predictably linked to certain fishery management regions, more selective fishing gears, certification and high fishery value.

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(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

Then the research team used surveys and interviews with experts to uncover deeper reasons why outliers were doing so well. They found that fish stocks doing better than expected had lower conflict among fishers, less industry interference in decision-making and better estimates of total catches.

“When you realize that fisheries management is all about human relationships, our results make complete sense,” said Schiller, lead author. “What’s surprising is that even within our country – which has the same laws and regulations from coast to coast to coast – we see such differences in catch oversight and in how management decisions get made.”

[Read the full study. \(https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/faf.12815\)](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/faf.12815)

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