

Study on Science within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans

Submission to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

August 2022

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is pleased to submit this written submission to the House of Commons's Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans' Study on Science within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Founded in 1951, CAUT is the national voice for academic staff representing 72,000 teachers, scientists, librarians, researchers, general staff, and other academic professionals at some 125 universities and colleges across the country.

Science undertaken by the government complements, contributes to and benefits from the work of CAUT's members. Government science facilities, like the Experimental Lakes Area, welcome post-secondary researchers and students alongside government scientists. When government science is well funded, supported, and allowed to be freely shared with the broader scientific community, there are direct and indirect benefits for Canada's academic research community and, ultimately, all Canadians. For this reason, **CAUT joins other stakeholders to recommend that funding for government science be increased by at least \$740 million annually in order to return funding levels to 2010/11 levels.**¹ Likewise, Canadian government science benefits when academic research is well funded and supported. Regarding academic research, **CAUT recommends a commensurate increase to the granting councils for researchers working at post-secondary institutions from coast to coast to coast.**

Government science is often well positioned to pivot on short notice to studying emerging situations. For example, the sudden and unexplained die-off of a fish stock calls for rapid deployment of scientists to investigate, collect samples and data, and to propose initial theories for the phenomenon. Once frontline government scientists have done the initial work, however, academics often turn to government research, samples and data for future investigation. For this reason

¹ [A decade of defunded public science: preparing for the next crisis—CSPC \(sciencepolicy.ca\).](#)

and to encourage cross-pollination and knowledge mobilization, **CAUT recommends that the DFO adopt an even more ambitious open science approach that allows for the broadest possible dissemination of government science, including datasets, to the public and global scientific community.**

Further, CAUT noted with interest that the DFO recently adopted a [scientific integrity policy](#) and that DFO scientists successfully enshrined in their collective agreement a so-called right to speak clause.² Though these are welcome steps towards the unmuzzling of government scientists, CAUT remains concerned that not enough has been done to ensure government scientists will always be free to share their work. Though government scientists are now guaranteed the right to speak publicly on their area of expertise, there remains a risk that if they share information that displeases their employer, they could face subtle reprisals including the stalling of their careers and evaporation of professional opportunities. **CAUT encourages your committee to consider how it might better protect DFO scientists from a working culture that subtly chills and discourages the communication of “inconvenient” science.**

The DFO's tripartite mandate — supporting the economic, ecological and scientific health of Canada's oceans and inland waters — can present challenges for policy-makers. Scientific evidence can sometimes be diametrically opposed to industry's interests, for example, and DFO policy makers must balance competing interests and perspectives. Though it is legitimate for policy-makers to sometimes make decisions that run counter to the best scientific advice, it is a disservice to science everywhere to allow interference with and misrepresentation of science. CAUT feels strongly that scientific evidence ought to be presented as transparently as possible, free of political spin, even if decision makers ultimately decide to run

² [Unmuzzled government scientists are ready to talk—Macleans.ca](#)

counter to the science. For this reason, we are concerned by recent reports that industry is interfering in the peer review process of DFO science. For these reasons, **CAUT recommends the DFO take steps to ensure its scientific peer review process is free of industrial interference.**

It would be my pleasure to appear before your committee to answer any further questions you might have or to provide any additional information which may be helpful.

Communication can be facilitated through CAUT's policy and government relations officer, Andrea Stuart, at stuart@caut.ca.

Respectfully submitted,



David Robinson, Executive Director