

Manitoba's Recreational Angling Strategy

Project Overview

The Manitoba government released its Recreational Angling Strategy on May 25, 2021, for public engagement through EngageMB. During that same time, the province held numerous meetings and events with stakeholders and the public to solicit feedback on the strategy. Engagement concluded on June 30, 2021.

The strategy proposed a suite of angling regulation changes aimed at increasing opportunities for angling, while enhancing protection of Manitoba's valuable fish populations.

The strategy included proposed changes to:

- angling licences
- angling seasons, possession limits and size restrictions
- live bait harvest and use
- Ice fishing shelters
- enforcement

Expected results of the strategy include reduced red tape, enhanced protection of fish population, more opportunities to fish, increased local economic benefits, simplified regulations, added flexibility and enhanced enforcement provisions.

Implementation of the strategy is proposed to take effect on April 1, 2023.

Engagement Overview



15 meetings and events held with stakeholder organizations



Over 10,000 anglers represented by stakeholder organizations



37 Days of Online Engagement



1,443 contributions on EnageMB



1,170 written submissions



1,100 survey respondents



3 podcasts to discuss the strategy



70 letters sent to Indigenous communities and organizations

Emerging Themes of Feedback

- Anglers support proposed measures to enhance protection of fish populations.
- Most anglers are excited about increased opportunities to fish year-round for some species.
- Many anglers want more enforcement of angling regulations and more officer presence on the landscape.
- Some anglers expressed concern about the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species into new waterbodies; however, anglers remain divided on the proposed ban on the harvest and use of aquatic live bait.

Overall Level of Support

Stakeholder Engagement

The province held 15 meetings with angling stakeholder organizations and participated on multiple podcasts.

Highlights from stakeholder engagement:

- Stakeholder organizations representing over 10,000 anglers are in support of the overall strategy and had constructive suggestions to enhance angling opportunities and fish stock protection.
- Stakeholders are nearly unanimous in support of the proposed regulatory changes to modernize angling licences.
- Stakeholders are in overwhelming support of proposed changes to angling seasons, possession limits and size restrictions. Some stakeholders raised concerns on how the proposed changes would impact competitive fishing events.
- Most stakeholders are in support of the proposal to ban the use of live bait fish and leeches in Manitoba, as they understand the risk of aquatic invasive species to the industry.

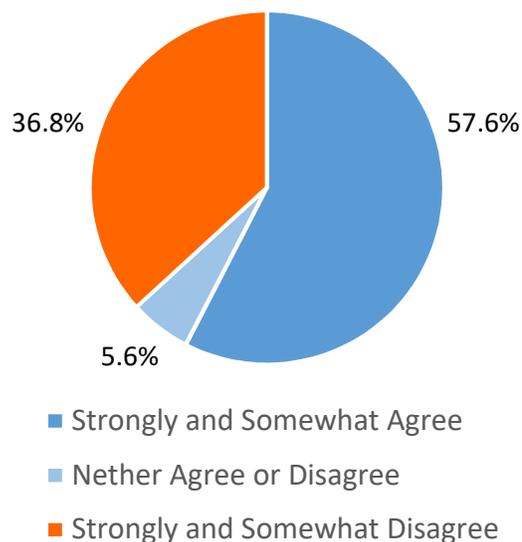
Online Public Engagement

The province collected feedback from the public through EngageMB.

Highlights from online respondents:

- 57.6 per cent of online survey respondents indicated they strongly or somewhat agree with the proposed changes.
- 5.6 per cent of online survey respondents neither agree nor disagree.
- 36.8 per cent of online survey respondents indicated they strongly or somewhat disagree with the proposed changes.

Note: This graph displays responses from the online engagement only and does not include stakeholder feedback.



The Manitoba Government is Listening

The province has made some modifications to the proposed changes outlined in the strategy to address suggestions and concerns raised by stakeholders and the public through the engagement process.

Below is a highlight of the proposed modifications. These modifications address most of the comments that disagreed with proposed changes to the ‘seasons, limits, and size restriction’ portion of the strategy. The modifications enhance the overall goal of providing more angling opportunities while enhancing protection of fish populations. More details are outlined in the following pages of this report.

Original Proposal	Modification Made	Rationale
<p>One walleye / sauger over 55 cm, and none over 70 cm</p> <p>One northern pike over 75 cm, none over 90 cm</p> <p>One smallmouth bass over 40 cm, none over 45 cm</p>	<p>No walleye / sauger may exceed 55 cm</p> <p>No northern pike may exceed 75 cm</p> <p>No smallmouth bass may exceed 45 cm</p>	<p>During engagement, many respondents expressed a desire for further protection of some species.</p>
<p>Walleye / sauger season will be closed from the first Monday in April to and including the third Friday in May in the Southern Division.</p>	<p>Walleye / sauger season will be closed from the first Monday in April to and including the second Friday in May.</p> <p>A lake-specific regulation for Lake Winnipeg would be added where the walleye / sauger season would not open until the third Friday in May. This decision is based on long-term spawn testing data, which indicates spawning may still occur later into May on Lake Winnipeg.</p>	<p>During engagement, stakeholders and the public had concerns with not being able to fish for walleye during the third week in May.</p> <p>The department determined the walleye / sauger season can open for the second Saturday in May with the following adjustments made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no walleye / sauger over 55 cm, and - adding a lake specific regulation for a later start to the season on Lake Winnipeg (third Saturday in May) which is based on historical spawn testing data that shows walleye are still spawning on Lake Winnipeg later in May.

		- Closing all angling on the northern reach of the Red River from the first Monday in April to and including the second Friday in May to protect spawning walleye.
The original proposal did not include possession limits or size restriction for white bass, burbot and bigmouth buffalo.	The following possession limits and size restriction have been added: - white bass - limit 10 - burbot – limit 6 and none over 70 cm - bigmouth buffalo – limit 0	During engagement, respondents suggested new possession limits and size restriction for white bass, burbot and bigmouth buffalo.

Next Steps

The Manitoba government will initiate the regulatory amendments required to adopt the changes outlined in this document. Amendments are required within the Manitoba Fishery Regulations under Canada’s Fisheries Act and within two provincial regulations: The Fishing Licensing Regulation, and Fishing Licence Fee Regulation.

The regulatory amendment process will include additional opportunities to comment on the proposed changes.

The target implementation date for the changes to come into effect is April 1, 2023.

Proposed Changes to Modernizing Angling Licences

Moving to a Single Annual Licence Type

The province proposed moving to one annual licence for each residency type; away from the current two-tier licence system of conservation and regular licences.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	11 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 3 per cent made comments opposed and 86 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

Adding a One-Day Licence

The province proposed to add a one-day licence for Manitobans, Canadians and non-residents.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	11 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 2 per cent made comments opposed and 87 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

Reducing Red Tape for Manitoba Seniors

The province proposed removing the requirement for Manitoba seniors to obtain an angling licence. Manitoba seniors would be required to show proof of age (65 years or older) while angling.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	11 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 3 per cent made comments opposed and 86 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

Modest Changes to License Fees

The province proposed to implement modest fee changes to reflect the move to one annual licence type and the addition of a new one-day licence option.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	9 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 3 per cent made comments opposed and 88 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

Ability to Carry your Angling License Electronically

The province proposed to remove the requirement to sign your angling licence, meaning anglers may carry either an electronic or paper copy of their licence.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	12 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 2 per cent made comments opposed and 86 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

How Manitoba is Moving Forward

Given the overwhelming support from stakeholders and online respondents, the Manitoba government is moving forward with all proposed changes related to modernizing angling licences as outlined in the strategy, including:

- moving to one annual licence type
- adding a one-day angling licence for all residencies
- making modest fee changes
- removing the requirement for Manitoba seniors to obtain a licence
- allowing anglers to carry an electronic copy of their licence

Regulatory amendments are required before these changes can be implemented. The target implementation date for the changes is April 1, 2023.

Proposed Changes to Angling Seasons, Possession Limits and Size Restrictions

Species-specific Seasons

Manitoba proposed to implement species-specific seasons, which will allow anglers to fish year-round for some species.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	The majority of stakeholders supported this proposed change. Almost all stakeholders supported the opportunity to fish for some species year-round and the associated increase in the local economic benefits with additional fishing-days.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	<p>15 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 8 per cent made comments opposed and 77 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.</p> <p>Some individuals expressed concerns related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- how the new regulation would be enforced- how the new regulation would impact incidental by-catch of non-targeted species, such as walleye, during spawning. The proposal does include enhanced protection of walleye through reduced possession limits, new size restrictions and strategic areas closed to all angling during spawning.

Walleye Season Closure

The province proposed to implement a closure of the walleye / sauger season from:

- the first Monday in April to and including the third Friday in May in the Southern Division, and
- May 1 to and including the third Friday in May in the Northern Divisions.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	While stakeholders support species-specific seasons, they were divided on this proposed walleye season dates.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	<p>9 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 12 per cent made comments opposed and 79 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.</p> <p>Most people supported the change to species-specific seasons, but some individuals expressed concerns that the proposal would mean they would not be able to target walleye for one additional week each spring. The proposal has been modified to address this concern.</p>

Closed to All Angling Areas

The province proposed to strategically close some areas to all angling during the spring season. Proposed “closed to all angling” areas include the Red River and its tributaries, to the first impassable barrier between Lockport and Lake Winnipeg, the Assiniboine River downstream of the Portage Diversion to Highway 240, and Dauphin Lake and its tributaries.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Most stakeholders supported this proposed change; however, some stakeholders expressed concerns related to the closure of the Red River for one week longer than the current closure.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	<p>9 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 5 per cent made comments opposed and 86 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.</p> <p>Some people expressed concern that the northern reach of the Red River would be closed for one</p>

	additional week to all angling. The proposal has been modified to address this concern.
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Possession Limits

The province proposed to implement one possession limit for all licence types by fish species. Lake specific regulations will still apply to protect vulnerable fish populations or to create unique angling experiences.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	The majority of stakeholders supported the proposed possession limits as they added extra protection to key species.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	<p>18 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 11 per cent made comments opposed and 71 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.</p> <p>Some stakeholders and individuals asked for possession limits for new species such as burbot, white bass and bigmouth buffalo. The proposal has been modified based on these requests.</p>

Protection of Large Fish

Manitoba proposed to implement new size restrictions to protect large fish, enhancing opportunities to catch trophy-sized fish.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Most stakeholders supported the proposed changes to size restrictions. Many stakeholder asked for further protection of certain species.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	<p>23 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 9 per cent made comments opposed and 68 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.</p> <p>Some stakeholders and individuals suggested even further protection of certain species. This was particularly evident from respondents in the Northern Divisions where high quality management is already in place for species such as walleye.</p> <p>Some individuals expressed concerns related to:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- their desire to have no retention of large walleye to protect the large spawning females. This includes numerous suggestions for alternative size restrictions- how the new size restrictions would impact competitive fishing events- how the new size restrictions would impact the taxidermy industry <p>The proposal has been modified to provide further protection of certain species, such as walleye, through adjustments to size restrictions. The modifications are outlined in the “How Manitoba is Moving Forward” section included in this report.</p> <p>The modifications do not address concerns raised about competitive fishing events or the impact of taxidermists. The Manitoba government will work with these industries to transition their operations under the new regulations.</p>
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How Manitoba is Moving Forward

The province has made some modifications to angling seasons, possession limits and size restrictions based on feedback received during engagement. These modifications address concerns raised by stakeholders and the public that expressed opposition to the original proposal.

Notable changes are highlighted in bold font in the table below. These modifications address much of the opposition received related to angling seasons, possession limits and size restrictions. The target implementation date for the changes is April 1, 2023.

Species	Season	Possession Limit	Size Restrictions
Walleye / Sauger	<p>Southern Division:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open second Saturday of May, to and including the last Sunday of Spring Break • Closed first Monday in April, to and including the second Friday in May <p>A lake-specific regulation for Lake Winnipeg where the walleye / sauger season would not open until the third Friday in May.</p> <p>Northern Divisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open third Saturday in May to and including Last Day in April • Closed May 1, to and including the third Friday in May <p>Anglers must not target Walleye or Sauger during the closed season.</p> <p>Anglers must immediately release all Walleye and Sauger incidentally caught during the closed season.</p>	4	None may exceed 55 cm
Northern Pike	Open year-round	4	None may exceed 75 cm
Lake Trout	<p>Southern Division:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open November 1, to and including September 14 • Closed September 15 to and including October 31 <p>Northern Divisions:</p>	1	None may exceed 65 cm

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed during spawning, to be determined upon further consultation' 		
Lake Sturgeon	<p>Southern Division:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open June 16 to and including April 30 • Closed May 1, to and including June 15 <p>Northern Divisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open July 1, to and including April 30 • Closed May 1 to and including June 30 <p>Conservation closures on the Winnipeg River and the Nelson River systems remain in place.</p>	0	N/A
Smallmouth Bass	Open year-round	4	None may exceed 45 cm
Channel Catfish	Open year-round	4	None may exceed 60 cm
Stocked Trout	Open year-round	3	One may exceed 45 cm None may exceed 60 cm
Black Crappie	Open year-round	6	None may exceed 35 cm
Lake Whitefish	Open year-round	10	N/A
Bluegill and Pumpkinseed	Open year-round	10	N/A
Yellow Perch	Open year-round	25	N/A
Burbot	Open year-round	6	None may exceed 70 cm
White Bass	Open year-round	10	N/A
Bigmouth Buffalo	Open year-round	0	N/A
All other species	Open year-round	No proposed changes	No proposed changes

Proposed Changes to Aquatic Live Bait Harvest and Use

Banning the Harvest and Use of Aquatic Live Bait

The province proposed a ban of aquatic live bait harvest and use effective April 1, 2027, which included live bait fish and leeches. It did not include night crawlers or frogs.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Most stakeholders supported this proposed change to ban live bait use and harvest, including organizations that represent over 10,000 anglers in Manitoba. Many stakeholders requested that the ban should occur sooner than the five-year timeline proposed in the strategy.
Feedback from Industry	Industry did not support this proposed change.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	10 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 23 per cent made comments opposed and 67 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change. Those who opposed expressed that they want to continue to use live bait fish and leeches while angling.

How Manitoba is Moving Forward

The Manitoba government remains committed to phasing out the use of aquatic live bait. The province understands this will result in a negative impact to the live bait industry, but also recognizes there are significant risks with the continued use of aquatic live bait related to the movement of aquatic invasive species, unwanted fish species and fish diseases.

A number of mitigation measures were proposed by the live bait industry during engagement, some of which do not address the underlying risk posed by anglers who move live bait in water from one waterbody to another. To protect the \$600 million angling industry, the province will continue to explore opportunities to reduce the use of live bait fish and leeches in Manitoba, including the continued implementation of existing policy where live bait blocks cannot be transferred, resulting in live bait allocations being retired when a harvester leaves the industry.

The province will continue to engage with the live bait industry and angling stakeholders to discuss a phased plan to aid the transition of the live bait industry into a sustainable and safe business model. It is also committed to enhancing awareness of the risks of using live bait fish and leeches with anglers through a more robust education and awareness campaign, in partnerships with angling stakeholder organizations.

In conclusion, the Manitoba government commits to phasing out the use of aquatic live bait and will continue to engage with angling stakeholders and the live bait industry prior making any decision on how this will be accomplished.

Proposed Changes to Ice Fishing

Identification on Ice Fishing Shelters

The province proposed that anglers must continue to include identification information on ice fishing shelters; however, anglers will be able to use their fishing licence information as an alternative, as follows:

- first and last name **or** valid angling licence customer ID number
- phone number

An address will no longer be required.

Rights-based harvesters can use their full name and phone number.

Removal of Ice Fishing Shelters

The province proposed that ice fishing shelters in Area B in the Southern Fishing Division be removed by March 15.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely supported the proposed changes.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	3 per cent of online respondents made comments in support of the proposed change, while 1 per cent made comments opposed and 96 per cent did not specifically comment on this particular proposed change.

How Manitoba is Moving Forward

Given the overwhelming support, the Manitoba government is moving forward with all proposed changes to ice fishing shelter management as outlined in the strategy.

Regulatory amendments are required before these changes can be implemented. The target implementation date for the changes is April 1, 2023.

Proposed Changes to Fisheries Enforcement

Enforcement of Fisheries Offences

In early 2021, Manitoba resource enforcement staff joined the Department of Agriculture and Resource Development to form a new Wildlife, Fisheries and Resource Enforcement Branch. This strengthened partnership will focus enforcement efforts on the most serious fisheries, wildlife and resource infractions. It will also ensure that enforcement priorities are aligned with fisheries and wildlife priorities, and that it can respond to the changing landscape and needs.

Amendment to The Contraventions Act

Manitoba is proposing to move the Ticketable Offences currently under the Manitoba Fishery Regulations, 1987, to the federal Contraventions Act. This will ensure that enforcement of the designated offences will be treated as contraventions; will be less onerous on the offender; and more proportionate and appropriate to the seriousness of the violation.

This will also give the province the mechanism to effectively recover administrative court costs for summary convictions and ticketable offences.

What We Heard	
Feedback from Stakeholder Organizations	Stakeholders widely support the increased enforcement of fisheries regulations.
Feedback from Online Survey Respondents	11 per cent of online respondents commented on enforcement of angling regulations. Almost all comments supported the proposal to enhance enforcement and increase fines related to fisheries infractions.

How Manitoba is Moving Forward

Given the overwhelming support, the Manitoba government is moving forward with the proposed changes to enforcement as outlined in the strategy.

Manitoba will take steps to amend angling regulations with a target implementation date of April 1, 2023.

Thank you for providing feedback on Manitoba's Recreational Angling Strategy.

If you have questions, please email fish@gov.mb.ca.