

Who is Canada's Species At Risk Act Protecting? : Necessary Amendments to the SARA

Summary

Canada's Species At Risk Act, while valuable requires several key amendments in order for it to successfully protect Canada's endangered species. The act allows social, political, and economic impacts to determine whether or not a species will get protection, thereby reducing its efficacy. It ought to be amended to improve its ability to protect species at risk.



Recommendations

Amend the Act to:

- Require listing to be made within the 9-month window, thereby removing the extended consultation process, except in the case of aboriginal consultation
- Require the immediate listing of all species considered "endangered" by COSEWIC on Schedule I of the SARA
- Amend the act to require a protection plan be finalized within 1 year of listing

Flaws in the SARA listing process

Canada's Species At Risk Act (SARA) has the potential to be an excellent tool in protecting endangered species. It requires the immediate protection of any species listed, including identifying and protecting critical habitat. Problems arise, however, when listing would lead to social, political, or economic impacts. By putting these issues above species protection, we are weakening the Act's effectiveness. In these cases, species are either not listed, referred back to COSEWIC, or sent for extended consultation. If our legislation is not succeeding in what it was intended to accomplish, we must update it to do so. Currently the act does not require the protection of species considered vulnerable.

Box 1. Case study: the Southern Resident Killer Whales

First listed under SARA as endangered in 2003, the Southern Resident Killer Whales still do not have a recovery plan in place though many have advocated for one. The population is continuing to dwindle, and is currently down to 81 whales. Under these new recommendations for the SARA, this population would require a finalized protection plan be in place within 1 year.

Species the SARA has failed

Many of the species that do not get listed are either arctic or marine species, due to aboriginal issues and fisheries conflicts. This demonstrates the SARA's bias towards social and economic impacts instead of ecological impacts. Without an effective strategy for protecting these species, they are likely to continue towards extirpation or extinction.

Typically, if listing a species would cause conflicts there are two routes that can be taken. The first is the obvious one, where the Federal Government decides not to list the species. This often occurs when the species is harvestable, as is the case with the Porbeagle Shark (Box 2). The second route involves the listing of species (often after extended consultation) but the failure to develop an action plan to protect the species (Box 1). Either way, the Species At Risk Act fails to protect Canada's species at risk.

Box 2. Case study: The Porbeagle Shark

The Porbeagle Shark was assessed as "endangered" by COSEWIC in 2004, after having declined by 90% of its original population levels. In 2006, the government chose not to list it due to socio-economic concerns. In particular, there was concern that the listing would result in the end of direct and bycatch fisheries impacting the Porbeagle. Additionally, there was concern that closing the fishery would lead to a loss of information required for monitoring the population. If these recommendations are followed, the Porbeagle would be listed immediately.

Sources:

FINDLAY, C., ELGIE, S., GILES, B., & BURR, L. (2009). Species Listing under Canada's Species at Risk Act. *Conservation Biology*, 23(6), 1609-1617. doi:10.1111/j.1523-1739.2009.01255.x

<http://www.b7v.net/uploads/killer-whale.jpg>

<http://www.sharkguardian.org/shark-of-the-month-porbeagle-shark/>

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2007/DSF-LOTL-final2.pdf>

