



**Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and
Natural Resources**

**Comité sénatorial permanent de l'énergie, de l'environnement et des
ressources naturelles**

The Honourable Julie Dabrusin, P.C., M.P.
Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
By email: ministre-minister@ec.gc.ca

May 25, 2026

Dear Minister:

On February 26, 2026, the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources (the Committee) heard from two representatives of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), David S. Lee, Chair, and Christina M. Davy, Non-government Science Member, regarding the challenges currently facing their organization. On March 26, 2026, the Senate Committee heard from representatives of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG), including Jerry V. DeMarco, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, regarding the OAG's performance audit reports, including the one on supporting species at risk assessment and reassessment. Based on the evidence given, the Senate Committee wishes to bring several serious concerns to your attention.

The Senate Committee was informed that the problem is not the absence of a strong legislative framework. Rather, the COSEWIC representatives said that the *Species at Risk Act* provides a rigorous framework, but that the fundamental issue is its implementation. Under the Act, COSEWIC's assessments are the first step in the process that can lead to a species being listed, having legal protections and having a recovery strategy. As the COSEWIC Chair noted, the resourcing to COSEWIC is, in a sense, a gateway for assessments and reassessments.

The Senate Committee was concerned to hear that the resources currently allocated to COSEWIC are insufficient, limiting its ability to carry out its mandate in a timely and effective manner. The COSEWIC Chair noted that the organization's budget decreased from \$1.8 million in 2023–2024 to \$1.6 million in 2024–2025, which limits its ability to operate. He also noted that COSEWIC had been forced to scale back certain activities, including specialist subcommittee meetings, which has a ripple effect on the entire assessment process.

These concerns were corroborated by the OAG. Before the Committee, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development noted that the OAG's audit found that Environment and Climate Change Canada had not provided COSEWIC with the support needed

to complete assessments and timely reassessments. He also noted that, based on the department's target of 60 assessments and reassessments per year at the time of the audit, it would take over a century to assess all species that are potentially at risk. The Commissioner also argued that it is cheaper in the long run to protect and identify species before they get too endangered or their populations diminish.

The Senate Committee would also like to recognize the outstanding work of COSEWIC members, experienced scientists who dedicate extensive volunteer time, expertise and efforts to assessing species at risk in Canada. As noted by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, the system established under the *Species at Risk Act* cannot function optimally without their contribution. This situation makes it all the more important for COSEWIC to have the resources needed to fulfill its mandate effectively and in a timely manner.

Furthermore, the Senate Committee would like to draw your attention to the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee. The evidence clearly shows that the Subcommittee plays a vital role in ensuring that Indigenous knowledge is included in COSEWIC status reports. However, witnesses noted that its funding levels have been reduced substantially and remain insufficient. They also explained that this lack of resources greatly limits COSEWIC's ability to work with Indigenous communities and to adequately integrate their knowledge into the assessment process. The Senate Committee considers this to be a matter of particular concern, both for the quality of the assessment process and for the practical inclusion of Indigenous knowledge.

Given this situation, the Senate Committee would like to respectfully emphasize that insufficient support for COSEWIC will likely lead to fewer assessments and timely reassessments, a growing backlog, and slower implementation of Canada's biodiversity commitments. The Senate Committee therefore believes that it is important for COSEWIC to have sufficient, stable and long-term support so that it can fulfill its mandate effectively, including adequate support for the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee.

The Senate Committee would like to thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Joan Kingston, Senator
Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Energy,
the Environment and Natural Resources

c.c.: Catherine Cuerrier, Committee Clerk, Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources