



for a living planet®

**WWF Canada
Atlantic Office**

Suite 1202, Duke
Tower
5251 Duke Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3J 1P3

Tel: +1 902 482 1105
Fax: +1 902 482 1107
Email:
ca-atlantic@wwfcanada.org
Web: wwf.ca

WWF-Canada Input for FRCC Consultations

“An Examination of the Conditions and Considerations for the Sustainability of the Atlantic Canadian Groundfish Fisheries (Emphasis on Cod)”

May 6, 2010

Introduction

WWF-Canada appreciates the opportunity to participate as a stakeholder in the FRCC consultation process on conditions and considerations for the sustainability of Atlantic Canadian groundfish fisheries (emphasis on cod). WWF is committed to rebuilding depleted fish populations, protecting biodiversity, and restoring ecosystem health in Canada's oceans. WWF is working with local communities, managers, and industry to rebuild depleted cod populations on the Grand Banks and within Atlantic Canada.

Atlantic cod in Canada

Canada's Atlantic cod, a former icon of abundance and profitability, has become our country's 'poster child' of fisheries mismanagement, social upheaval, and long-term economic losses. Due to overexploitation, cod populations on both sides of the Atlantic have drastically declined from historical levels. Decades of unsustainable harvesting, due to unregulated and intensive fishing, have depleted Canada's cod populations, three of which have declined by 90% or more since the 1960's (Newfoundland and Labrador, Laurentian South, and Laurentian North populations). Continued overexploitation (through directed fisheries and bycatch), combined with changes in marine food webs in some areas of Canada, has significantly reduced the abilities of depleted cod populations to rebuild. In Canada, all Atlantic cod populations south of Baffin Island are now at such low levels that they are listed as endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), Canada's national advisory body for species at risk. Except for the Northeast Newfoundland population, cod stocks continue to decline, some in the absence of fishing and others are still being fished, directly or as bycatch, and not allowed to rebuild (1).

Recent DFO science assessments indicate an increase in the abundance of Northeast Newfoundland cod in recent years; however, this change in abundance is very small compared to the measured decline over the past three generations. The Northeast Newfoundland cod population is still considered to be well below the target that defines safe levels of harvesting (1, 2).

Safe levels of harvesting for marine fish populations

The UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) was adopted in 1995 and committed its parties to use a precautionary approach in managing straddling fish stocks, including in areas within the limits of national jurisdiction. Canada is a party to this agreement, along with the EU and US. Target reference points (also called recovery targets - levels of stock size one wishes to achieve) and limit reference points (also called conservation limits- levels of stock size one wishes to avoid), as well as action to be taken if reference points are exceeded, are required elements under UNFSA and in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (3).

European Management

In Europe, ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea), has developed recovery target and limit reference points for most of its stocks. Although some stocks in the Northeast Atlantic have yet to recover to sustainable levels, there are several examples of well-managed cod stocks that are stable, including Icelandic cod and Northeast Arctic cod in the Barents Sea. The Northeast Arctic cod stock is the largest in the world, largely due to the successful management of the Norwegian cod fishery. Target reference points and limit reference points have been identified for Northeast Arctic cod and the stock is managed using harvest control rules based on these reference points (4). This stock was certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in 2010, and another cod fishery in the Barents Sea is in the MSC assessment process.

US Management

In the Northwest Atlantic, the United States has also identified recovery targets, limit reference points, and harvest control rules for Atlantic cod stocks in an effort to rebuild endangered stocks. The US has also introduced clear language that binds its fishery management plans to reference points, and recovery plans for overfished stocks are required by legislation (5). These measures have allowed for the rebuilding of previously overfished whitefish stocks such as Gulf of Maine cod, Gulf of Maine haddock, and George's Bank haddock (6). In fact, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released its annual report card in May 2010, called the Status of U.S. Fisheries, and for the first time since its 1997 debut, no stocks were added to the overfishing list (7).

Canadian Management

Canada, however, has not made as much progress as the US and EU in rebuilding depleted cod stocks. Unlike stocks managed in the US and Europe, Canada has no recovery plans in place for endangered cod stocks, nor have they identified recovery targets or timelines. And, unlike the US, Canada is currently able to make ad hoc fishery management decisions. Canada has recently identified limit reference points (levels of stock size one wishes to avoid) for many Atlantic cod stocks, but all stocks are below, and some of them far below, their limits. Although a limit reference point has not been identified for Northeast Newfoundland cod, COSEWIC and Fisheries and Oceans Canada both assert that the stock is well below any reasonable limit reference point value (1, 2). The status of Atlantic cod in Canada illustrates that effective management and legislative tools, that are consistent with those used to manage stocks in other jurisdictions, are critically needed to prevent overfishing and rebuild depleted stocks.

A recovery plan for Canada's Atlantic cod

Canada can duplicate the success of its US and EU counterparts, by developing and implementing recovery plans to prohibit continued overexploitation of its cod stocks. Elements of a successful recovery plan include:

- Science-determined recovery target and limit reference points, i.e. levels of stock size fisheries managers aim to achieve and avoid
- Fishery rebuilding timelines over which the governing body aims to attain a particular level of stock size
- Harvest control rules using both target and limit reference points, i.e. rules which describe how harvest is intended to be controlled in relation to target and limit reference points.

To ensure fishery management decisions are based on recovery plan elements, Fisheries and Oceans Canada must introduce language to its fisheries management policies and plans that binds the management authority to respect and adhere to these targets and timelines.

As well, to enable rebuilding of cod stocks, it is critical that quotas for cod fisheries be based on scientific advice and be in accordance with fishery rebuilding plans guided by progress towards the achievement of target reference points under specific timelines, avoidance of limit reference points, and subjected to harvest control rules.

Hope for recovery

A recovery plan is no guarantee that a depleted stock will recover. But it is an effective tool that will allow for recovery, as demonstrated in other jurisdictions. Nations such as Norway and Iceland are reaping the benefits of managing its stocks within safe harvesting levels and allowing cod to build to levels to sustain a profitable fishery. These stocks are meeting new market demands for sustainable seafood. Recovery plans will ensure that Fisheries and Oceans Canada adheres to its various national and international commitments and will once again position Canada's fishing industry as a key whitefish supplier. The long-term economics of this measure are to the benefit of all Canadians.

For more information contact:

Shelley Dwyer

Fisheries Conservation Advisor
WWF-Canada
Atlantic Region
Suite 305, TD Place, 140 Water Street
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
A1C 6H6
T: 1.709.722.9453 ext. 2224
F: 1.709-.726.0931
sdwyer@wwfcanada.org

Dr. Bettina Saier

Director, Oceans
WWF-Canada
Atlantic Region
Suite 1202, 5251 Duke Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 1P3
T: 1.902.482.1105 ext. 24
M: 1.902.401.9209
F: 1.902.482.1107
bsaier@wwfcanada.org

References:

- 1. COSEWIC Wildlife Species Assessment (detailed version), April 2010. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). 2010.
http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/rpts/Detailed_Species_Assessments_e.html
- 2. Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS). Science Advisory Report 2009/009. Stock Assessment of Northern (2J3KL) cod in 2009. DFO (Fisheries and Oceans Canada). 2009.
http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/CSAS/Csas/Publications/SAR-AS/2009/2009_009_e.htm
- 3. "Lament for a Nations Oceans", Dr. Jeffery Hutchings. 2008.
- 4. International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). 2010. www.ices.dk
- 5. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. United States Government. 2007.
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2005/docs/MSA_amended_msa%2020070112_FINAL.pdf
- 6. Fish Stock Sustainability Index (FSSI): 2010 Quarter 1 Update through March 31, 2010. National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2010.
www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/2010/first/q1_2010_fssi_summary_changes.pdf
- 7. US Report Card. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2009.
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/sos_full28_press.pdf