

May 14, 1996

Honourable Fred Mifflin, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
200 Kent St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0E6

Dear Minister:

Conservation...Welcome Aboard

The mandate of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (FRCC) requires that it advise you on conservation requirements for Atlantic fish stocks. In keeping with this mandate we have conducted consultations with science and industry representatives on the conservation requirements for Georges Bank groundfish stocks for the forthcoming fishery.

The FRCC has now concluded consultations on eastern Georges Bank haddock, Georges Bank cod and Yellowtail Flounder. Our consultations were characterized by a strong conservation ethic on the part of all stakeholders. Over twenty-five industry representatives attended our meetings in Yarmouth as well as considerable interest on the part of the media and officials from your department.

The Council wants to take this opportunity to thank you and the department for the fine presentation given by the departmental officials from the St. Andrews Biological Station. The high level of debate and discussion at the Yarmouth consultation indicated how healthy the rapport between science and industry is in this area. We believe this is also indicative of the quality of the advice and the presentation, and ultimately, how far we have all come in working together to achieve our conservation goals. We want to further note how helpful we found the uncertainty calculations as a tool for demonstrating the potential long term effects of good conservation practices.

The Stock Status Reports, provided by Science, are attached to this letter. Some key highlights are presented below.

Haddock

The projected increase in haddock abundance is due primarily to recruitment of the 1992 year class, with support from the 1993 and 1991 year classes. The conservation efforts of the past two years with respect to management practices and reduced fishing effort have contributed to the growth in the biomass. Continued conservation efforts will sustain the rebuilding of the population in this stock. The $F_{0.1}$ calculation is estimated to be around 6,800 t but the biomass is projected to increase only marginally under that scenario. A lower yield would increase the chance that the biomass would increase in 1997.

Cod

While this stock was at the lowest observed level in 1994, the biomass increased only slightly in 1995. The exploitation rate for this stock has declined from a high of forty percent in 1991 - 93 to ten percent in 1995 (by-catch only). Although recruitment has been well below average for this stock, the 1995 year class appears to be of moderate strength. The $F_{0.1}$ projection for this stock indicates that a fishing level of 3,500 t (combined USA/Canada) will allow the biomass to increase slightly but would still be well below the levels seen in the 1978 - 90 period.

Yellowtail Flounder

The USA survey conducted in the spring of 1995 and the 1995 Canadian mobile gear show substantial increases over 1994. Although the abundance has increased over last year, the biomass is still very low compared to historic levels. It is noted that maintaining the catch at 1995 levels will allow for some rebuilding of this stock.

FRCC Consultations

The FRCC sent a letter to stakeholders asking them to consider the following questions about this stock:

1. In your opinion, is there sufficient evidence of stock recovery to justify an increase in the TACs for groundfish stocks for 1996?
2. Recognizing that the stocks have been at extremely low levels, what conservation measures are important to ensure the rebuilding of groundfish stocks?
3. What is an appropriate mix of cod and haddock to minimize by-catch and discarding?

Stakeholders were unanimous in asking the FRCC to consider strong conservation measures on all of these stocks. Those who fish on Georges Bank have seen the signs of recovery and they are committed to seeing these stocks rebuild. They all believed that a cautious increase in the TAC for cod and haddock would still allow for rebuilding of the stock. In the case of cod and haddock, all industry presentations recommended a number LOWER than $F_{0.1}$. Some debate occurred with respect to yellowtail flounder.

It was noted in consultations that delaying the opening of this fishery until June has had a positive effect as has the closed area on the US side of the line. It was stated by many of those present that the “hard line” on dumping and discarding through observer coverage and dockside monitoring has reduced this practice significantly from the previous decade and helped to minimize the number of small fish caught. Many spoke about more responsible fishing practices on the part of the industry.

FRCC Advice

The FRCC is committed to rebuilding these Georges Bank groundfish stocks. We have shown cautious optimism in our advice with respect to the rebuilding of these stocks given the favorable environmental conditions which exist on Georges Bank when compared with other areas, such as 2J,3KL. For example, cod on Georges Bank grow faster and reach maturity at age two and three as opposed to reaching maturity at age five or six for Northern Cod.

Council also feels confident about the rebuilding of these stocks given the strong conservation measures which exist in the management of this fishery such as mandatory hailing, use of square mesh gear for otter trawls, small fish protocol, observers, and the continued use of mandatory Dockside Monitoring. These measures are consistent with the Council’s approach to conservation and to rebuilding. We believe this is also consistent with the strong conservation ethic expressed by industry representatives at consultations on these stocks.

We believe that the three strongest criteria for consideration when setting the TAC for these stocks should be:

- **setting quotas below $F_{0.1}$,**
- **target an increase in biomass by 10 percent or more, and**
- **risk of decline in biomass (from the risk analysis) of the order of 20 percent or less.**

Please note that all of the Council’s quota recommendations, when combined with projected catch levels for the U.S. are: below the $F_{0.1}$ level established in the Stock Status Reports, allow for rebuilding of the stocks, and the risk of decline in the biomass from quotas at these levels is less than 20 percent.

Recommendations:

The Council recommends:

1. The Canadian quota for haddock on Georges Bank (5Zjm) be set at 4500t. This should result in an increase of 10 percent in the biomass for ages three and older .
2. The Canadian quota for yellowtail flounder on Georges Bank (5Zhjmn) be set at 415t. This should result in an increase of approximately 32 percent in the biomass for ages four and older.
3. The Canadian quota for Cod on Georges Bank (5Zjm) be set at 2000t. This should result in an increase of 7 percent in the biomass for age three and older. Although the projected level of increase in the biomass is slightly less than the 10 percent target, it is important to achieve a ratio of cod to haddock that is realistic so as to minimize the incentive to dump and discard.
4. The Council also recommends that we continue to work cooperatively with the U.S. and we applaud the progress that has been made. It is essential for our conservation strategy that both countries continue to restrain and monitor their fisheries. Meaningful dialogue with the U.S. must continue, especially as this relates to non-conservationist fishing practices such as dumping and discarding, and the catch of small fish.
5. Finally, the Council recommends that this fishery open on June 1, 1996.

Your Council is honoured to have this opportunity to present you with this advice and we trust you will find this helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



Fred Woodman
Chairman