

Notice to Fish Harvesters

North Atlantic Right Whale – Notification on implementation of lower breaking strength gear modifications in non-tended, fixed gear, trap and pot fisheries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec

Gulf – December 14 2023

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) announces the implementation of lower breaking strength (LBS) fishing gear in 2024 will be supported on a voluntary basis only in selected Eastern Canadian commercial fisheries.

Canada is committed to protecting North Atlantic right whales (NARW), a species listed as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act*, and to supporting their recovery. DFO continues to prioritize measures to prevent NARW entanglements in fishing gear, by closing areas to fishing when and where NARW are detected, and removing lost, abandoned and discarded fishing gear.

Since 2020, DFO has been collecting and assessing available information including gear trial results, and engaging with partners and stakeholders, to guide the implementation of LBS gear so that it is safe and effective for fishing operations. This engagement is important for helping harvesters transition successfully to equipment that better protects whales and supports access to seafood markets.

Through this process, DFO has identified certain commercial Lobster fisheries that pose an entanglement risk to NARW and that have achieved positive LBS gear trial results, demonstrating that the gear may be used safely and effectively in those fisheries. In 2024, DFO will engage with these specific fisheries to facilitate their voluntary adoption of LBS gear.

DFO also recognizes that LBS gear has not yet been demonstrated to be safe and effective for fishing in all non-tended, fixed gear including trap and pot fisheries in Eastern Canada. DFO's five-year Whalesafe Gear Strategy (hereafter the Strategy) will guide future work to implement whalesafe gear in Canadian fisheries, including on-demand fishing gear, based on the specific conditions of each fishery and informed by trial results. The Strategy will prioritize fisheries that present entanglement risk to right whales and other whale species, while ensuring harvester safety and gear effectiveness. The Strategy will be finalized in 2024 following further stakeholder and partner engagement.

In 2024, DFO will announce further details about measures to protect NARW in Canadian fisheries, including information on steps to expand and operationalize the use of on-demand fishing gear over time, in fisheries where this can be proven effective and safe.

For more information:

Whalesafe Fishing Gear: <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/mammals-mammiferes/whales-baleines/gear-equipement/index-eng.html>

North Atlantic right whale protection measures: <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especies/mammals-mammiferes/whales-baleines/narw-bnan/index-eng.html>