

MINUTES

Industry call on the opening of the fishing seasons

March 20, 2026 – 10:00 AM (ATLANTIC TIME)

1. **Opening & Housekeeping items (Fisheries and Oceans - Pierre Bélanger, chair)**

2. **Ice conditions & 3. Weather conditions (Environment and Climate Change Canada - Roxane Richmond, with Roberta McArthur & Jill Maepea on the call)**
 - Roxane presented on ice and weather conditions.
Presentation: Weather & Ice Presentation - Snow Crab Opening - March 20, 2026 (BIL)
 - There is a significant amount of ice that remains in the Gulf, more than we've seen for the past couple of years. Significant ice concentrations are along the western coast of Cape Breton, through the Northumberland Strait, closer to the Central Gulf around the Magdalen Islands, as well as through Baie de Chaleurs.
 - More information can be found at the following link:
 - Daily ice briefing: [GCC e-Nav - Daily Ice Briefings](#)
(Choose St Lawrence; 2025-2026 Presentations; 4-Présentations March.)
 - Ice Charts : [Ice Products - Result - Product Search - Canadian Ice Service](#).
(Choose Gulf of St.Lawrence)

4. **Ice breaking work (Canadien Coast Guard - Michael Pope)**
 - **Louis St-Laurent (Heavy Ice Breaker):** This vessel was in Shippagan on March 19th to break out the harbor entrance, which will help flush the channel.
 - **Earl Grey:** This vessel is scheduled to be in the area prior to the fishery opening. Its mission will include ice breaking, search and rescue duties, and the deployment of aids to navigation.
 - **Hovercraft:** While not definitively scheduled for next week, it will likely be available for ice breaking in the Gulf starting in late March or early April.
 - **Smaller ice breaking vessel:** Scheduled to arrive in the Gulf next week.

Contracts:

- **Amphibex:** Began breaking out ice in Shippagan on March 17th. Scheduled to move to Caraquet next week to break ice in and around the wharve.
- **Tug:** A contract is currently in active with Group Ocean for a tug to provide supplemental ice breaking support as required. Potential use for the tug next week.

Industry comments and questions:

They appreciated the deployment of the Louis S. St-Laurent and Amphibex for effectively opening harbour entrances and supporting operations (e.g., Shippagan). They emphasized the continued need for smaller icebreakers and the Group Ocean tug for narrow channels, and noted that the deployment of the Judy LaMarsh would further strengthen regional capacity.

5. Safety at Sea

5.1. Aids to navigation (Canadien Coast Guard Services - Andrea Leblanc)

- **Buoys:** Contractor and large buoys delivered or near delivery.
- **Contracts:** Ready to proceed once ice conditions allow.
- **Deployment:** Earl Grey is the primary vessel for buoy deployment, also handling ice breaking and search and rescue.
- **Operations:** Placement on hold pending suitable weather and ice conditions.

5.2. Search and rescue (Canadien Coast Guard Services - Gairot Sullivan-Tatton)

Cutters stations: Most stations, including Shippagan, Rivière au renard, Souris and Summerside, are expected to be operational by April 1st, pending ice conditions. The Magdalen Islands station is scheduled to be operational by March 21st.

Large vessel assets: Earl Grey (primary vessel), Pierre-Radisson (tentative March 25 availability), Kopit Hudson (unless an emergency, he will be positioned near Cape North for the fishery opening).

Air assets: Operational readiness of 30 minutes during the first 8 hours of the weekday opening (starting at 7:00 a.m. AT), followed by a transition to a standard 2-hour posture. A request to maintain a 30-minute posture will be made if the opening occurs earlier.

Industry comments and questions:

- Industry requests that fishers who normally travel long distances to their fishing grounds be allowed to relocate to a harbor closer to those grounds before the season opens, to improve safety. This request aims to ensure that vessels traveling from distant ports are not forced to set their traps during hours of darkness.
- The Canadien Coast Guard (CCG) acknowledge that opening the fishery prior to daylight or having fishers set traps in the dark creates significant safety risks and complicates emergency response operations. To ensure maximum safety coverage, it was noted that a unified start time is preferable to align with the peak availability of Search and Rescue assets. CCG committed to continuing this conversation as the region moves closer to an official opening date.

5.3. Marine Safety and Security (Transport Canada – Rob Freek)

Information will be shared regarding regulations, vessel stability, and the importance of maritime safety and security.

6. Dredging (Fisheries and Oceans - Eric Mallet)

New Brunswick

- **Pigeon Hill:** The contract has been awarded, and work is anticipated to begin on April 1st or as soon as the fast ice has cleared sufficiently to operate safely.

Prince Edward Island

- **Tignish:** Small Craft Harbors is monitoring the situation and notes there may be a need for land-based dredging, though this is not expected to delay any harbor openings.
- **Lennox (Hardy's Channel):** Authorities are monitoring the area and will conduct a survey of the channel once conditions are safe.

Nova Scotia

- **Inverness and Bay St. Lawrence:** The current plan is to begin dredging on March 30th

7. Proposed Time for Next Call**Quebec**

- Daniel Desbois (ACG) – Next week
- Paul Boudreau (RPPIM) – Next week
- James Metallic-Sloan (Listuguj) – March 27 call
- Christina Burnsed (Gesgapegiag) – March 27
- Merrielle Ouelette (12F) – March 27
- Gilles Duguay RPPSG – March 27

New Brunswick

- Martin Noël (APPCA) – March 27
- Réjean Noël (ACA) – March 27
- Mathieu Hébert (UPM-MFU) – March 27
- Robert Kryszko (Pabineau) – March 27
- Dawn Francis (Elsipogotog) – March 27
- Rachel Nowlan (Indian Island) – March 27
- Merrill Martin (Natoaganeg) – March 27

Prince Edward Island

- Alden Gaudet/Ricky Doyle (PEISCFI) – Call next week
- Danny Tuplin (Lennox Island FN) – Call next week
- Tyrone Paul (Abegweit FN) – Call next week
- Ian MacPherson/Laura Ramsay (PEIFA) – Call next week

Nova Scotia

- Billy Brophy (Area 18) – Call next week
- Frank MacInnon (12 F) – Call next week
- Bobby Gould (12 F) – March 27

Proposed Date: There is a strong consensus among industry representatives to hold the next call on **March 27th**.

8. Meeting Closure

Meeting minutes and presentation deck to be distributed shortly and an update on the date of the next call to be shared early next week.