

**SOUTHERN GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE SNOW CRAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 25, 2015 - MEETING SUMMARY**

**1. Welcoming Remarks and Introductions**

Andrew Maw, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Regional Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, provided opening remarks and advisory committee members were introduced during a round table.

**2. Summary of Stock Status**

The results of the assessment of the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence (SGSL) snow crab and advice for the 2015 fishery were presented by Marc Lanteigne to members. The full report can be found at: [http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/Publications/SAR-AS/2015/2015\\_013-eng.html](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/Publications/SAR-AS/2015/2015_013-eng.html). Highlights of the report included the following details:

- The total landings of snow crab from the SGSL in 2014 were 24,439 tonnes (t) from a revised quota of 24,230 t. The exploitation rate for the SGSL snow crab fishery in 2014 was estimated at 37.1%.
- The 2014 snow crab scientific survey resulted in a total of 353 stations surveyed between July 9 and October 12.
- The available biomass for the 2015 fishery, derived from the 2014 survey, is within the healthy zone of the Precautionary Approach (PA) framework.
- The total commercial biomass in the 2014 survey was composed of 65% of new recruitment (45,630 t) and 35% of residual biomass (23,897 t).
- The recruitment of the commercial biomass increased by 11.9% relative to the previous year.

Basil MacLean, Area 19 Snow Crab Fishermen's Association, asked if there were any connection between snow crab found in the Gulf and Maritimes Regions. Mikio Moriyasu, DFO Science, responded that snow crab does not move in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence across the Laurentian Channel, therefore it is normal for some snow crab to move into the Maritimes Region. He also added that DFO does not have enough data to quantify the magnitude of the movement of snow crab between the two DFO Regions. Robert Haché, Association des Crabiers Acadiens, explained that industry is trying to put in place a more advanced tagging program. Members of the SGSL snow crab advisory committee confirmed that they supported the initiative. Andrew Maw acknowledged that the Department could look further into the industry tagging program and determine if the exercise is valuable for the Department and stakeholders.

**3. Setting of Total Allowable Catch Based on Decision Rules**

Marc Lanteigne provided a risk analysis relative to reference points for the 2015 fishery. The biomass for the 2015 snow crab fishery is 67,534t. As a result of the application of the harvest decision rules, the exploitation rate for 2015 will be set at 38.55% with a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of 26,036 t.

**4. Review of "Use of Fish" Project to Fund the Scientific Survey for 2015**

Marc Lanteigne, DFO Science, presented the background on the Use of Fish project to fund the snow crab scientific survey. The Jean Mathieu is the name of the chartered vessel used for the 2015 scientific survey for the third year of a three year contract. The costs to conduct the survey for the Use of Fish project for the past three years were as follow:

Year	Quota	Cost
2013	376 t	\$746,000
2014	379 t	\$836,000
2015	380-430 t *	\$880,000 *

\* Anticipated numbers for the 2015 use of fish project.

The increase in cost for the 2015 survey is due to the charter fees, net repairs, staff salary and the addition of new trawl monitoring equipment.

Science asked the members of the advisory committee if there was an agreement in principle that snow crab harvesters agree to finance the SGSL survey by using a portion of the quota for 2015. No objections were raised on that question.

### **5. Implementation of a Multi-Year Approach to the Snow Crab Fishery**

Réjean Hébert, DFO Resource Management, introduced the multi-year planning approach by reminding members of the advisory committee that this subject is part of the service delivery changes announced by the Department in 2013. While several fisheries have already moved to a multi-year cycle, it was decided at the time to delay the multi-year approach for the SGSL snow crab fishery until the implementation of the harvest decision rules. Harvest decision rules were implemented in this fishery in 2014.

The implementation of the multi-year approach would have no impact on the annual snow crab stock assessment (trawl survey and biomass estimate) which will continue on a yearly basis. However, the Regional Advisory Process (RAP) and the SGSL Snow Crab Advisory Committee meeting will occur every second year with the next processes scheduled for 2017. During alternate years, Science will conduct a science response process while Resource Management will provide interim communications. The Department also has a Science framework review process which has occurred every five to six years in the past. These Science framework review are special meetings which are called on request to review stock assessment methodologies when new information or new techniques become available to science.

A table summarizing the differences between a RAP and a science response process was presented. To summarize, industry would not normally participate in a science response process, but would be provided the formal Science advice. A conference call or a WebEx session with members of the advisory committee could also be arranged upon request.

Marc Lanteigne presented a process with indicators that would trigger/justify a temporary change of the two-year management cycle. With the annual trawl survey results, Science would conduct a preliminary verification of the survey data by mid-December of each year. In the event that the first run biomass estimate would fall outside the 95% confidence interval of the expected biomass estimated from the previous year assessment, a RAP would be organized immediately.

Most members of the advisory committee expressed a strong negative response towards the implementation of the multi-year approach in the SGSL snow crab fishery. Members of the advisory committee questioned the use of only one trigger, as well as the large range of the confidence interval (i.e. 95%). It was suggested that the Department consider more responsive triggers (ex: a 10% increase/decrease of the biomass estimate). Industry questioned why the RAP will move to a multi-year process while industry covers the fees for this process and the trawl survey through the Use of Fish agreement. Suggestions provided included the reduction of the RAP to a one-day event instead of the previous three-day process, as well as a meeting hosted by industry and the participation of

DFO as a guest. Industry believes that there are alternate ways to reduce costs. In their views, the multi-year process implemented in other fisheries is not working well and they proposed that a working group be put in place to evaluate associated costs and triggers.

Andrew Maw reiterated that the Department has been instructed to move forward with the implementation of the multi-year approach while causing the least negative effect on the fisheries. However, he agreed with the creation of a working group to evaluate triggers, communication method of results and associated costs. It was confirmed that the working group would consist of members who were part of the Snow Crab Harvest Strategies and Decisions Rules Working Group active in 2013-2014.

## **6. Elimination of 100% Temporary Transferability**

Réjean Hébert addressed the issue of 100% temporary transferability. He reminded everyone of the discussions that previously occurred on this subject during the 2014 advisory meeting and the support of the members of the advisory committee to roll-over the temporary measures for another three years. However, the renewal of 100% temporary transferability was not supported by the Minister because it goes against the principle of the owner-operator policy. As a result, a one-year transition period was allowed for the 2014 fishing season.

Réjean Hébert summarized the results of the Department's consultations with fleet representatives during the fall/winter 2014-15 on a proposed temporary transfer limit. Some fleets suggested reverting to the measures in place prior to 2010 while others were opposed to the elimination of 100% temporary transferability. Réjean Hébert informed participants that DFO was evaluating this issue and that a decision would be announced in the upcoming weeks.

Andrew Maw asked industry if there were any questions regarding temporary transferability and if they would support re-enforcing temporary measures in the event of a low TAC such as in 2010. Carter Hutt asked if the decision on the elimination of 100% temporary transferability was final. He indicated that this measure was very important for the PEI traditional fleet because they have less quota than the midshore fleet which can at times lead to less economic viability. He also stated that First Nations and the new access fleets have the option to designate vessels/operators. Andrew Maw indicated that the designation option for First Nations was part of the Aboriginal Communal Fishing Licence Regulations.

## **7. Conservation and Protection Update**

Ron Belliveau, Gulf Region Conservation and Protection (C&P) Chief of Enforcement Operations, provided a review of the 2014 snow crab fishery which included data on enforcement/surveillance hours, violations and at-sea observer coverage. He also explained some improvements made to the hail-out system which will help DFO to better calculate the percentage of at-sea observer coverage. Martin Noël, Association des pêcheurs professionnels crabiers acadiens, asked how the results of the observer coverage were calculated. Ron Belliveau responded that the only trips counted as observed trips are those where landings have occurred. Martin Noël also asked for details on the level of coverage in crab fishing area (CFA) 19. Ron Belliveau responded that the requirement in CFA 19 is a total of ten observers per day.

Ron Belliveau informed the group that there will be an increase in midshore patrol vessels in 2015. A compliance model will also be implemented for the 2015 snow crab season in CFAs 12, 12E and 12F. As a result, fish harvesters will observe fishery officers conducting different enforcement work compared to previous years. Martin Noël inquired on the objectives of the midshore patrol vessels for 2015. Ron Belliveau responded that an increased enforcement presence on the water is required to meet the need in CFA 12. Martin Noël asked details on the compliance model. Ron Belliveau responded that the C&P division is still in discussion on the specifics of the plan, but confirmed that Fishery Officers will most likely perform sampling and verify a specific amount of vessels. Christian

Brun, Maritimes Fishermen's Union, asked if there were compliance models used in other fisheries. Ron Belliveau responded that a compliance model was also in place in the lobster fishery. Paul Boudreau, Regroupement des Pêcheurs professionnels des Îles-de-la-Madeleine, asked if the immersion time would be verified during the analysis. Ron Belliveau responded that the immersion time will not be one of the key elements of the compliance model.

Robert Haché questioned why the soak time was not part of the compliance model. He also indicated that fish harvesters are often forced by the fish plants to leave their catch in the water longer than the 72 hours limit which results in violations. Ron Belliveau responded that Fishery Officers are aware that in some cases, fish plants put restrictions on fish harvesters. As a result, Fishery Officers will focus on those who intentionally leave their catch in the water above the 72 hours limit.

Industry was also reminded that the vessel monitoring system has been in place for over ten years in the SGSL snow crab fishery and that some of the units are starting to get old. It was suggested that fish harvesters have their units verified to ensure they are functioning properly. The C&P division observed some issues with some of the units in the past seasons. Martin Noël informed the group that the iridium VMS unit functions very well, costs much less and is capable of sending emails. Ron Belliveau confirmed that the iridium unit is a high performance unit that can provide the option of data bundling which can reduce the cost for fish harvesters.

Leonard LeBlanc, Gulf Nova Scotia Fishermen's Coalition, felt that there were not enough Fishery Officers in the field in the Cheticamp area. Edmond Martin, C&P Director, informed the group that they have one new recruit that will be going to Cheticamp in 2015 which will result in no vacancies for the Cheticamp detachment.

Ghislain Cyr, Regroupement des Palengriers et Pétoncliers Uniques Madelinots, specified that fish harvesters were starting to question the required fees for the at-sea observer program contracts. He suggested that observers should also have a contract where they would have to reimburse fish harvesters if they don't meet the 20% coverage limit. Ron Belliveau suggested that this type of remark should be sent to the C&P division. Ghislain Cyr also questioned the at-sea observers' specific roles and asked if harvesters should be paying a fee when the at-sea observer is sick and is not capable of doing its work. Ron Belliveau indicated that the two basic principles for the at-sea observers are the monitoring of soft shelled crab and compliance. Ron Belliveau said they were preoccupied with the reduction in observer coverage in the Quebec Region. There was a new observer company and they have been reassured that the issue would not be repeated for the 2015 fishing season.

Edmond Martin indicated that the at-sea observer contract is a business transaction between the fish harvester and the at-sea observer company. If the protocol is not followed, fish harvesters should inform DFO.

Dave MacEwen, PEI Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, asked how many of the violations were issued by observers and asked if DFO could provide a breakdown of the 43 violations that occurred during the 2014 fishing season. Ron Belliveau indicated that the details could be provided and that they will be added to the minutes.

**Table 1: 2014 Snow Crab Violations in CFAs 12, 12E, 12F and 19**

<b>Violations</b>	<b>Gulf and Quebec Regions</b>
<b>Response Pending</b>	<b>12</b>
• Registration/Licence	11
• Other Legislation	1
<b>Warning</b>	<b>45</b>
• Area/Time	1
• Illegal Gear	1
• Registration/Licence	28
• Other Legislation	15
<b>Investigation Initiated</b>	<b>11</b>
• Area/Time	1
• Registration/Licence	4
• Other Legislation	6
<b>Charges Laid</b>	<b>37</b>
• Area/Time	1
• Illegal Gear	1
• Registration/Licence	21
• Other Legislation	14
<b>Total Violations</b>	<b>105</b>

*Note: total violations vary from the original numbers provided during the 2015 snow crab advisory meeting. This is a result of updated files after the numbers were accounted for prior to the meeting.*

## **8. Oceans – Marine Protected Area Network Development**

Christine Ferron made a presentation on the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence Bioregion. An MPA Network is a collection of marine protected areas that operates cooperatively to fulfill ecological aims. The primary goal of the Network is to ensure long-term protection of marine biodiversity, ecosystem function and special natural features. In addition to MPAs, other marine conservation tools have the potential to contribute to MPA network goals, including Fisheries Act closures, critical habitat protected under the Species at Risk Act, Protected Heritage Wrecks and coastal lands owned or managed by non-government organizations.

The MPA Network development process acknowledges and considers socio-economic and cultural aspects and attempts to minimize the socio-economic impacts on Aboriginal groups, stakeholders and coastal communities. Potential socioeconomic and cultural benefits of an MPA Network include helping to protect and restore fishery resources and their habitats, enhancing productivity, conserving traditional uses and cultural heritage, maintaining and developing tourism and leisure activities and contributing to the eco-certification process.

The MPA Network Development process includes four steps: Data and Information Gathering, MPA Network Design, Implementation and Management and Monitoring. Fishing associations will have the opportunity to receive up-to-date information on the network development, contribute to the integration of socioeconomic and cultural information into the network design and share opinions and concerns about possible MPA network options.

More details on this topic can be found at the following link:

<http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/planning/marineprotection-protectionmarine/index-eng.htm>

Questions raised by participants tended to focus towards existing Areas of Interest as opposed to MPA network planning. Martin Noël confirmed that it was a region of interest for his group and asked if there were sites of interest that already existed. Christine Ferron confirmed that an MPA currently exists in Basin Head, PEI and the Shediac Valley has been identified as an Area of Interest for evaluation as a potential MPA. She added that industry will have a chance to provide input on the strategy and the design options before the MPA Network design is finalized.

Daniel Desbois and Paul Boudreau asked if the snow crab survey will be affected if trawling is not permitted. Bernard Morin stated that trawling would not be allowed in zone 1 of the American Banks (the Area of Interest located within DFO's Quebec Region). Marc Lanteigne added that the MPA is very small so Science would be able to adapt its survey to sample around the closed area to ensure that there is no impact on the snow crab survey.

Alyre Gauvin asked if this presentation was considered a formal consultation on the subject since he felt this forum was not the appropriate time to be consulted. Christine Ferron confirmed that this was only a presentation to industry to advise of upcoming consultations. Andrew Maw also added that more information will be provided and that the DFO is simply being transparent. This presentation is not an official consultation and industry will have a chance to provide their views during targeted engagement with individual fishing associations.

Basil MacLean asked, in relation to the Shediac Valley Area of Interest, if there were maps available demonstrating overlays of the trawl surveys, observer coverage and fishing activities in the Shediac Valley. Christine Ferron responded that only 0.16% of the landed value for snow crab in the SGSL comes from the Shediac Valley.

Christine Ferron added that the MPA network strategy would be distributed in the next weeks and reiterated that industry will be consulted. She added that the MPA designation process can be very lengthy; it can take between 5-10 years to create each individual MPA.

## **9. Info Items: National Online Licensing System and Tags**

### NOLS

A checklist on the National Online Licensing System (NOLS) was distributed to members of the advisory committee as a tool to ensure fish harvesters have the proper documentations and have paid all required fees before commencing their fishing activities.

Gaëlle Lemay, DFO Business System & Strategic Planning, informed the group that the process is slightly different for fish harvesters from the Quebec Region and that they can continue with the existing process.

Andrew Maw asked the group to encourage their members to renew as soon as possible and to help people to find ways to remember their passwords. He explained that in some instances, passwords have been reset 11 times for one individual.

Leonard LeBlanc asked if Service Canada was going to take over the NOLS. Andrew Maw and Gaëlle Lemay explained that NOLS is a 3-tier customer service where Service Canada provides one level of service, while the areas and the offices provide other levels of services. They confirmed that the process should not change and that the Department is focussed on: one service/one process.

## Tags

Réjean Hébert informed the participants that the color for the original tags in 2015 will be yellow, while replacement tags will be the color pale blue. Because of concerns raised by industry, DFO is in the processing of initiating consultations on tag colors for 2016 and beyond. Industry will need to provide their feedback no later than April 30, 2015 on the following two questions:

1. Does the current tag colour protocol (i.e. one colour for all species) meet the needs of your organization? Please explain why?
2. Are different coloured tags by species or by zone required? Please explain which species or which areas and why?

Both the Gulf and Maritimes Region will be issuing replacement tags of a different color. Other DFO region will be issuing replacement tags of the same color as the original tags. However, the Quebec Region has agreed to follow the same process as the Gulf Region for the SGSL snow crab fishery.

Cory Francis, Mi'Kmaq Conservation Group, informed the group that he was previously told that all tags would be the same color for 2015. He also asked what will happen with service providers who were previously informed that a 3-year protocol would be in place and have planned their orders based on this information. Andrew Maw confirmed that the protocol for 2015 has been established. However, the Department is conducting consultations due to the various requests for different colors based on different species, zones, etc.

## **10. Questions and Answers Period**

### Question #1 - 2014 At-Sea Observer Coverage (Robert Haché)

*In the fishery review document presented during the RAP, it was indicated in Table 4 (page 16 – english version), that the percentage of fishing trips covered by at-sea observers in Area 12 for 2014 was at a level of 13.3%. After verifying with our members, it would seem that the 2014 coverage by the midshore traditional fleet was comparable to the coverage for 2013 (i.e. 20%).*

*Can you provide the level of at-sea observer coverage in 2014 for Area 12 for the following categories?*

1. *Traditionals - midshore*
2. *Traditionals – inshore*
3. *First Nations*
4. *New Access*

*In the same document, it is indicated that the coverage level for Areas 12E and 12F was 13.6% and 13.5%, respectively. Are those numbers accurate? If yes, for what reason was the required level of coverage of 20% not applied?*

Ron Belliveau responded that the methods used by the Science and the C&P divisions are not identical. He also informed the group that C&P no longer calculates the percentages by fleet and that they will be doing their calculations differently this year because there are now two companies providing services.

The difference of at-sea observer coverage between CFA 12F (15%) and CFAs 12 & 12E (20%) was questioned. Bernard Morin responded that the Department evaluated a request for a reduction from 20% to 15% in CFA 12F. It was concluded that that the objectives of the soft shell protocol could still be met with a 15% coverage in CFA 12F. He also added that the soft shell protocol in CFA 12F is managed by sectors instead of quadrants in CFA 12 and 12E. Bruno-Pierre Bourque, Area 12F,

also explained that when a sector closes in Area 12F, the area affected is much larger than when a quadrant is closed in CFAs 12 and 12E.

Robert Haché is against the different costs imposed by DFO to certain licence holders vs others. Andrew Maw confirmed that the department would evaluate this further.

Martin Noël expressed his concerns with the large variance in the results provided by both the Science and the C&P divisions. He suggested that DFO agree on a calculation method or at least justify the differences in the results.

Question #2 – Delayed season Opening (one nautical mile area in Area 12 bordering Area 19) (Martin Noël)

*Extract from the Notice to Fish Harvesters dated April 25, 2014:*

*“A delayed season opening to June 1 applies to an area in CFA 12 for one nautical mile bordering on CFA 19. The Buffer zone between CFAs 18 and 19 remains in effect.”*

*An official request to eliminate the delay of season and the buffer zones was formulated and supported by the majority of the members of the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence Snow Crab Advisory Committee in 2014. Can we know the reasons why a decision was made to maintain the delay of season and the buffer zones?*

Martin Noël specified that all members of the advisory committee, except representatives from Area 19, already expressed their position on this matter. He requested that the Department provide a written response on the decision to maintain the delayed season opening.

According to Robert Haché, the buffer zones were established to the advantage of Area 19, and to the disadvantage of CFAs 12 and 12F. He suggested that the buffer zones and delayed season opening be at least placed halfway between the two areas if they are not going to be eliminated.

Bruno-Pierre Bourque confirmed that fish harvesters from CFA 12F also requested that the buffer zone be eliminated.

Basil MacLean confirmed that representatives of CFA 19 have expressed their position on the matter in writing. While he understands the opinions of others, the group maintains its position to keep the delayed season opening between CFAs 12 and 19.

Several members of the advisory committee expressed their opposition to the delayed season opening. Andrew Maw indicated that the SGSL snow crab fishery has accomplished a lot and that there is currently harmonization between the groups. He closed the topic by saying that the Department has noted the comments and that it will reflect on this matter.

Question #3 – Temporary Allocations in Area 12F (Paul Boudreau)

*Can you explain to us why certain permanent fish harvesters from Area 12 (within the new access group group) were eligible to receive temporary allocations in Area 12F in 2014 while other permanent fish harvesters in Area 12 were not eligible? Why a double standard? Can you explain how those temporary allocations were distributed between fish harvesters in Area 12?*

Paul Boudreau indicated that he did not understand how a permanent fleet could continue to have access in CFA 12F and asked why the access was not provided to all permanent fleets.

Robert Haché requested that the Department ensure that the same protocols are followed in both regions (Gulf and Quebec) and that this issue be corrected. He added that licence holders with regular licences should be required to follow the same protocol as everyone else.



Paul Boudreau asked if there were fish harvesters fishing in CFA 12F who received more quota than some of the fish harvesters fishing in CFA 12 during the 2014 season. Bernard Morin explained the sharing arrangement in CFA 12F and mentioned that some fish harvesters are engaged in a pooling activity because of the small individual quotas and also because CFA 12F has limited fishing ground. He also indicated that the TAC in 2014 was one of the highest ever seen for CFA 12F which explains the reason why some licence holders received a higher amount of quota than normally.

## **11. Other**

### **a. Quota Shares (Robert Haché)**

Robert Haché distributed a document summarizing the mid-shore traditional crabber's associations' point of view on the distribution of the SGSL snow crab allocation to fishermen from the new access group. He apologized for not circulating the document prior to the meeting and indicated that he is not asking for the group's position on the document. He stated that the document provides a summary on the allocation of snow crab quotas to new access fleets and its distribution among the participants.

Réginald Comeau, Maritimes Fishermen's Union, showed his discontent with regards to the presentation and specified that this meeting is not the forum to talk about the current sharing agreements. He added that the quota allocated to his association is being fished by individual fish harvesters.

Andrew Maw responded that the document presented by Robert Haché touches on the owner-operator policy. He also acknowledged that some new access groups are careful with the distribution of their allocations to ensure they are compliant with the owner-operator policy. He asked the group to review the document shared by Mr. Haché and to share their views with DFO.

## **12. Closing Remarks**

Andrew Maw thanked everyone for their thoughtful and frank comments during the meeting.

## **END OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 15:26.