

GULF GROUND FISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
(Virtual Meeting via the Zoom platform)
March 13, 2024, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

RECORD OF DISCUSSION

The 2024 interim meeting of the Gulf Groundfish Advisory Committee was held virtually via the Zoom platform. Participants included representatives from the groundfish industry, Indigenous groups, provincial governments (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec), ENGOs, as well as staff from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). An interim meeting was held this year, mainly to share the results of new scientific stock assessments and abundance index updates, and to seek members' views on Total Allowable Catch (TAC) levels and other management measures for a number of groundfish stocks.

The chair (Carole LeBlanc, Director of Fisheries and Resource Management) welcomed participants, did provide guidance on the use of the Zoom platform, and conducted a roll call.

Additional membership requests were made, the terms of reference will be under review over the next year and these requests will be assessed at the same time.

DFO Updates

Review of Agenda

The chair shared the agenda with the group, and it was accepted as is.

Record of discussion GGAC 2023

No concerns were raised about the record of discussion for the 2023 GGAC meeting shared with participants prior to the meeting. The terms of reference remain unchanged from the previous year.

DFO Update

Julien Cormier, the senior advisor for Gulf groundfish provided updates on groundfish rebuilding plans, IFMP, and the precautionary approach for Atlantic Halibut 4RST.

Action Items: Share the update with the group in the drop box.

Sciences – Summary of Stock Status

Atlantic cod in NAFO Divisions 4T-4Vn

Presented by Daniel Ricard (DFO science, Quebec region)

An update on stock assessment summary of the Atlantic cod in NAFO Divisions 4T-4Vn was provided to

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the group. Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Greenland halibut 4RST

Presented by Jean-Martin Chamberland (DFO science, Quebec region)

An update on stock assessment summary of the Greenland halibut 4RST was provided to the group. Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Northern Gulf cod (4RS, 3Pn)

Presented by Jordan Ouellette-Plante (DFO science, Quebec region)

An update on stock assessment summary for 4RS, 3Pn Northern Gulf cod was given to the group. Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Atlantic halibut longline survey

Presented by Mathieu Desgagnés (DFO science Quebec region)

Seven years of the longline survey and tagging project have been completed since 2017. At least seven partnering industry associations are collaborating together with DFO on this project.

An overview of the objective of the Atlantic halibut longline survey was shared, which is to fulfill the needs for important scientific data: recent levels of fishing exploitation, interaction with other commercial species, spawning biomass abundance index, population size structure, distribution of the species and changes in it and the interannual migration patterns. GGAC allows stakeholders to express their support or not for a project. The renewal of the agreement is desired for 2024 and future years.

Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Science Advice to support the rebuilding plan for Atlantic Cod 4T-Vn

Presented by Jenni McDermid (DFO Science Gulf region)

Jenni McDermid from Gulf region DFO Science delivered a presentation on the science advice to support rebuilding plan for Atlantic Cod 4T-Vn. Rebuilding plan are now a legislated requirement for major fish stocks that are in the critical zone or below the Limit Reference Point (LRP) of the Precautionary Approach (PA) framework. Science advice is required to support the development of key aspects part of rebuilding plans including the stock status, the cause of decline, establishing both rebuilding target and recovery timeline, etc. Mrs. McDermid provided an update on the stock status and LRP for Atlantic Cod in NAFO Division 4T-4Vn.

Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Bycatch of Gulf of St. Lawrence Groundfish Stocks Subject to Rebuilding Plans

Presented by Julien Cormier (DFO Gulf region)

Mr. Cormier mentioned that 4RS3Pn cod, 4T American plaice, 4T white hake, 4T Winter flounder and 4TVn Atlantic cod are in the critical zone of the PA, which requires that a rebuilding plan be developed for each stock. Rebuilding plans have been developed in consultation with stakeholders and are currently pending ministerial approval for implementation in Spring 2024. The recommended management measures target reducing removals from all sources to the lowest possible level. Mr. Cormier also shared a presentation on groundfish bycatch in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and how these limits would be managed in other directed groundfish fisheries.

Please refer to the presentation for more details.

A few concerns on bycatch level were shared by a number of members. Committee members are welcome to share their concerns and comments anytime by emails.

Atlantic halibut 4RST Mobile gear fleet quota transfer

Presented by Julien Cormier (DFO Gulf region)

As part of the establishment of Atlantic Halibut geographical fleet shared in 2007, a decision was taken to transfer a significant portion (85%) of the bycatch allocation held by the mobile gear fleet sector to eight inshore fixed gear fleets. Since 2017, the amount transferred has been 92.5 per cent of the mobile gear fleets' allocation. During the 2023-24 fishing season, the temporary transfer of quota represented 514.25 tonnes (t) transferred from the mobile gear fleet to the eight inshore fixed gear (64.25 t per inshore fixed gear fleet). In light of the imminent reopening of the Unit 1 redfish commercial fishery, the Department recognizes the necessity to recalibrate this temporary transfer of quota to adequately address the Atlantic halibut bycatch requirements of the mobile gear fleets.

Mr. Cormier shared DFO's proposed approach to determining bycatch requirements for the mobile gear fleet sector, using a potential scenario for the 2024-25 Unit 1 redfish fishery based on the previous year's Atlantic halibut TAC. The proposed approach calculates the needs of Atlantic halibut for each mobile gear fleet based on their respective redfish allocation quota, multiplied by the 10 year bycatch average of 1.01%. When the Atlantic halibut bycatch requirements of all three mobile gear fleet reaches 100% of its allocated quota, the temporary transfers would no longer be authorized. Based on the proposed approach, once redfish TAC would reach approximately 79 557 t, all temporary transfer of quota would no longer be authorized.

Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Action Items:

Share information on bycatch predictability for each of the fleet sector for the Redfish fishery with GGAC members.

NHQ to share more information on bycatch % of the scientific report.

Advice on TAC and Management Measures

Presented by Julien Cormier (DFO, Gulf region)

The Chair asked GGAC members for their perspective on a TAC for the 2024-25 management period for Greenland halibut 4RST, Atlantic halibut 4RST and cod 4RS3Pn. The majority of members stated that they would provide their recommendations and comments in writing for each stock. All

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recommendations from members must be received by March 20th.

For more details, please refer to 2024-25 - Advice on TAC and Management Measures document that was shared with the stakeholders on March 27th, 2024.

Action Items:

DFO to send recommendations received to the members.

Fishery Monitoring Policy

Presented by Léa Olsen (DFO, Gulf region)

Mrs. Olsen shared a presentation on the Fishery Monitoring Policy, including background information and steps associated with the policy's implementation for sustainable fisheries. Fisheries monitoring provides the department with data on fishing activities, including landed catch and by caught species, essential to support sustainable management of stock and fisheries.

Mrs. Olsen describes the six-step process set out in the policy, covering aspects such as identifying the fisheries to which the policy applies and how to improve monitoring programs. Priority stocks for the Gulf Region were presented.

Please refer to the presentation for more details.

Other items

The Chair noted that the information on the US MMPA, Species at Risk Program, the Ghost Gear Fund, Safety at Sea was shared with the group prior to the meeting.

Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked all the participants, all those who shared presentations, and wished everyone a great fishing season. The Chair concluded the 2024 interim Gulf Groundfish committee meeting.