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Friday, May 14, 2010

The Honourable Gail Shea, M.P.
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
200 Kent Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0E6

Re: Management Measures for Snow Crab in Crab Fishing Area 1 – Nunatsiavut

Dear Minister Shea:

Pursuant to the provisions of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, it is my pleasure to provide for your consideration the Torngat Joint Fisheries Board recommendations on the management of the Nunatsiavut snow crab fishery in Snow Crab Fishing Area 1.

The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board was established by the three signatories to the land claim agreement and its powers and responsibilities are defined in Chapter 13. Put succinctly, the Board is tasked to provide the responsible Minister(s) sound advice and recommendations relating to the management of the Nunatsiavut fishery.

The Board takes great care to ensure that it consults with key stakeholders and gathers latest available information for use in its deliberations. The Nunatsiavut Snow Crab Workshop organized by the Board and held in Happy Valley - Goose Bay, Labrador on March 18 and 19, 2010 is an excellent example.

The Board brought together all the key stakeholders including participants from the harvesting and processing sector, market and fishery experts, representatives of DFO science and management, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, and the Nunatsiavut Government. The Board also utilized a skilled workshop facilitator and contemporary approaches for eliciting stakeholder feedback to arrive at consensus on a number of key fishery issues.

The attached briefing note provides the details of a series of recommendations relating to quota levels for 2010, re-definition of snow crab management areas, an exploratory fishery, and a short summary of the Board's analyses and key considerations.

We look forward to your timely response to this submission.

Your's truly,

John Mercer
Chairman
Torngat Joint Fisheries Board

cc. William Barbour, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources
Clyde Jackman, Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture
LILCA Implementation Committee

Torngat Joint Fisheries Board Recommendation Briefing Note

Title: Management Measures for Snow Crab in Crab Fishing Area 1 – Nunatsiavut

Issue: The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board offers recommendations on the management of the snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*) fishery adjacent to Nunatsiavut pursuant to its responsibilities under the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement.

Recommendations

The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board recommends:

- 1. The two Crab Management Areas currently defined and described as **2J North** and **2H south of 55° 50' N (2GHJ)** be merged into a single crab management unit bounded to the south at latitude 54° 40' N and to the north at Latitude 55° 50' N (see Appendix 2).*
- 2. The change in the crab management area be implemented for the 2010 crab fishing season and communal snow crab licences to the Nunatsiavut Government and its designated fishers be adjusted accordingly.*
- 3. The portion of Crab Fishing Area 1 situated north of latitude 55° 50' north be managed as an exploratory snow crab management unit, with a maximum pre-emptive catch level for this management unit set at 100t.*
- 4. Transfer of quotas between the crab management areas be prohibited. Quotas assigned for the exploratory snow crab management area must be harvested in the area north of latitude 55° 50' north.*
- 5. The 2010 Quota level for the Nunatsiavut Snow crab fishery be maintained at the 2009 level of 462t.*

Background

- The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board (TJFB, the Board) is the primary body providing recommendations and advice on the conservation of a species set out in the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (The Agreement), and the management of fisheries in the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (other than the Inuit Domestic Fishery, whose management falls under the authority of the Nunatsiavut government).
- Nunatsiavut fishers enjoy exclusive access to the snow crab fishing grounds in Crab Fishing Area 1, as described in the Atlantic Fishery Regulations, 1985. The commercial fishery occurs in two crab management areas: **2J North** - situated

between 54° 40' N and 55° 20' N and **2H South of 55° 50' N (2GHJ)** situated between 55° 20' and 55° 50' N. There has also been nominal fishing effort in an exploratory zone north of 55° 50' (see crab management areas Appendix 1). This exclusivity enables the Nunatsiavut Government, fishermen and DFO flexibility to implement conservation measures quickly in response to changing conditions.

- Crab Fishing Area 1 is a large area, but it contains a modest resource (The recorded peak TAC of 700t was established in 1999; 2009 TAC of 462t). Fisheries research has been intermittent in this area, but there is considerable data indicating the NAFO division 2H and 2J boundary marks a natural biological boundary for the species. Beyond the 2J/2H line conditions for snow crab production are marginal, and resource abundance becomes sparse and discontinuous.
- A TJFB study of the management and development of the Nunatsiavut snow crab fishery completed in March of 2010 revealed the following key points:
 1. The resource off Nunatsiavut is satisfactorily managed,
 2. Labrador Inuit fishers and the Nunatsiavut government enjoy considerable autonomy and a strong working relationship with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in managing their fishery, and
 3. Like other snow crab fisheries of Atlantic Canada, the Nunatsiavut snow crab resource is in decline and fishermen are experiencing difficulties brought about by prevailing global economic conditions. Changing marine conditions and weak recruitment are the predominant reasons behind the observed reduction in TAC and catch rates.
- On March 18 & 19, 2010 the Board conducted the “Nunatsiavut Snow Crab Workshop” as the primary tool to solicit stakeholder input and discuss the challenges in the fishery. The workshop included local fishermen and processors, market and fishery experts, DFO management and science representatives, Nunatsiavut Government officials, the provincial Department of Fisheries & Aquaculture, and Board members and support staff.
- The Nunatsiavut Snow Crab Workshop focused around 5 themes: Quotas, Conservation, Timing, Locations and Brainstorming. The topics received extensive discussion and debate, with quotas and the uncertain state of the Nunatsiavut fishery the foremost concerns of participants.

Current Issues

- The matters of utmost urgency for fishermen are the re-definition of the crab management areas within Crab Fishing Area 1 and maintenance of existing quota levels. Currently, Crab Fishing Area 1 is divided into three Crab Management areas:

1. **2J North** (54° 40' N to 55° 20' N); 362t quota in 2009.
 2. **2H south of 55° 50' N (2GHJ)**; 100t quota in 2009, and
 3. **2H north of 55° 50' N Exploratory (2GHJ)**, an exploratory fishing area with provision for a maximum catch up to 100t. This area contains all fishing grounds north to 61° north (i.e. the NAFO Division 2G/0B Boundary line).
- Nunatsiavut fishers made the following proposals:
1. The two management areas located south of 55° 50' N and north of 54°40' N (i.e. **2J North** and **2H south of 55° 50' N (2GHJ)**) should be merged into one large crab management area. This will allow fishermen flexibility to harvest crab throughout Crab Fishing Area 1 and reduce fishing intensity on the more heavily exploited grounds in 2H.
 2. The area north of 55° 50' should continue to be managed as an exploratory zone, with quotas or trip limits attached to exploratory permits for this area not transferrable (i.e. harvested) south of the 55° 50' line.
 3. The 2010 TAC for Crab Fishing Area 1 should be maintained at the 2009 level of 462t.

Analysis/Key Considerations

1. Change in Management Areas

- The impetus for combining the crab management areas is conservation based. Fishermen posit that distributing fishing effort broadly across the larger combined area will be beneficial for the resource. Fishing pressure can be shifted to better producing areas to allow recovery of exhausted fishing grounds. Fish harvesters are attempting to conservatively manage the resource while maintaining a viable commercial fishery.
- Snow crab off Newfoundland and Labrador is a single continuous resource and current management areas and lines are utilized to allocate fishing opportunities and distribute effort. Crab Fishing Area 1 is a Nunatsiavut exclusive fishing area. Quotas are held by the Nunatsiavut Government and the Torngat Fish Producers Cooperative Society Limited and are fished by the same group of 6 fishermen. Hence there are no ancillary conflicts or competing uses to be resolved.
- The redefinition of crab management areas within Crab Fishing Area 1 is a minor exercise, requiring only a change in the licence and licence conditions issued to the Nunatsiavut Government and the 6 designated fishermen in the commercial fishery.

2. Exploratory Fishing Area north of 55° 50

- There has been limited fishing activity in the exploratory area north of 55° 50, with insignificant catches. The Torngat Jiopt Fishery Board conducted a survey in a portion of this zone in July and August of 2009 to identify the distribution and abundance of commercial aggregations. The survey designed in cooperation the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, with support from the Northern Labrador crab harvesters, Torngat Fish Producers Society Limited, the Nunatsiavut Government, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture.
- No commercial quantities of snow crab were caught during the survey, but those trapped were large and healthy and found in areas where they had not been observed previously, suggesting that their range has extended northwards. Fishermen support additional exploratory surveys.

3. Maintenance of Existing Snow Crab Quotas

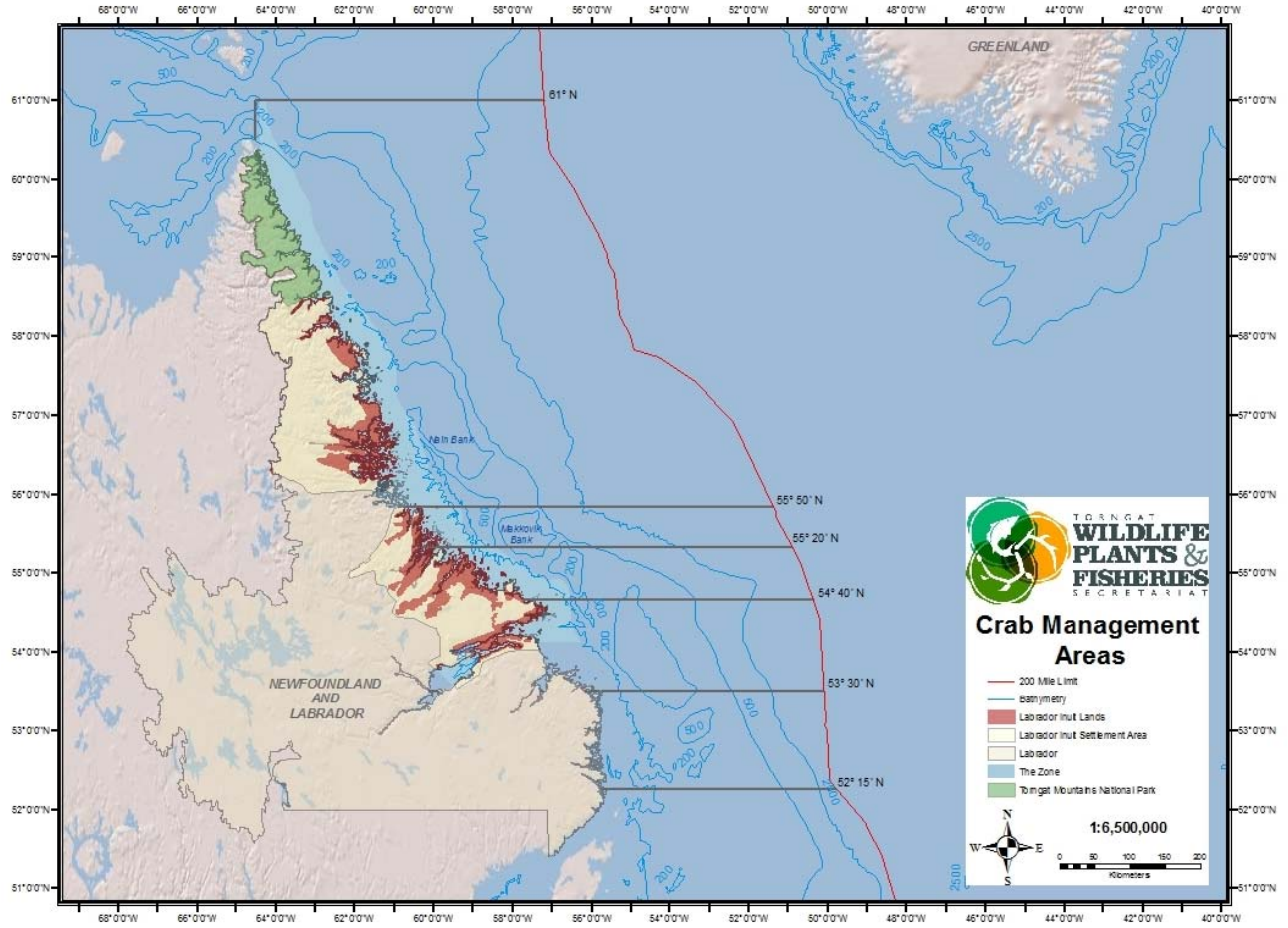
- Research vessel surveys occur in NAFO Division 2H every second year. The most recent stock status advice was developed from research vessel surveys conducted in fall 2008, which indicated a very modest and declining snow crab resource, with poor recruitment prospects. Data from the 2009 fishery shows a continued downward trending CPUE.
- Fishermen contend that they are seeing recruitment and small crab in 2H. There is no new scientific information to validate or refute this observation. The next research vessel survey for Division 2H is scheduled for fall of 2010 and will provide new data for use in developing conservation measures for the 2011 fishing season.
- For NAFO division 2J the most recent stock assessment (March 2010) indicates a decline in the biomass, with some potential for modest recruitment in the medium term. Commercial fishery data indicates a reduced catch rate during the 2009 fishing season. Labrador Inuit fishermen have a less pessimistic view of the resource status in the 2J North portion of Division 2J and it was posited that the deteriorating condition of the 2J south fishery is driving the negative outlook for the division as a whole.
- It was suggested that 2J north data should be disaggregated from the remainder of the area, but this involves unit by unit assessments that are scientifically intractable.
- The quotas involved are nominal and fishing grounds are distant. Declining catch rates and cost of fishing will render the fishery uneconomical thereby mitigating any threat to the sustainability of the resource.

Current Status

- There are still several weeks remaining before the commencement of snow crab fishing operations in Nunatsiavut.
- The remainder of the Newfoundland Snow crab industry is paralysed by a dispute over prices, and while the season is officially open there has been very little harvesting activity.
- Nunatsiavut fishermen await decisions on quotas and the change in management areas in CFA 1 in order to put in place fishing plans for 2010.

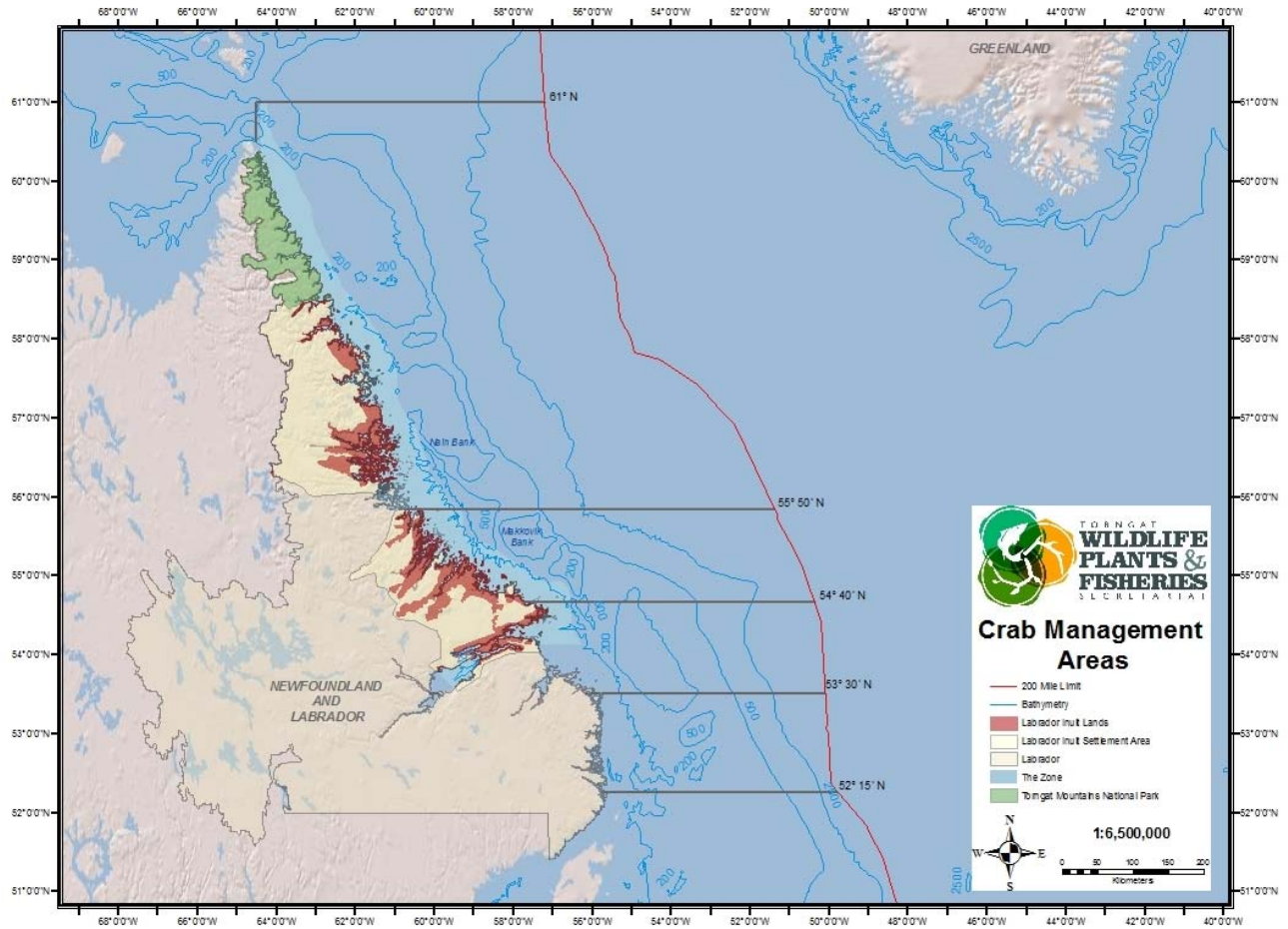
Appendix 1

Coordinates of Current Crab Management Areas in Northern Labrador



Appendix 2

Coordinates of Revised Crab Management Areas in Northern Labrador



Approved By: _____ Chairman, Torngat Joint Fisheries Board

Approved By: _____ Executive Director, Torngat Secretariat

Prepared By: Torngat Wildlife, Plant and Fisheries Secretariat