



Wednesday, March 27, 2013

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

Re: Snow Crab Co-Management In and Adjacent to the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area

Dear Minister Ashfield:

The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board (TJFB or 'the Board') was established by the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA) as the primary body advising the Minister on matters relating to the conservation and management of fish, fish habitat, and fisheries in Nunatsiavut, with advisory powers in waters adjacent to the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area.

The Board has carried out biophysical research, social-economic analyses, and multi-stakeholder workshops annually since 2009 in partial fulfillment of this core mandate. The attached recommendation reflects our current understanding of the resource, the social-economic context, and discussions with fishers, processors and managers at the fourth annual Snow Crab Workshop in November of 2011, and at the Regional Assessment Process in St. John's in February of 2012. Specifically, the TJFB recommends that:

1. The TAC in 2HJN be reduced by 15% (55MT) to 312MT.

The co-management of Snow Crab in and adjacent to Nunatsiavut is an excellent example of meaningful collaborations informing sound decisions. We look forward to continuing to build on this process.

Yours truly,

John Mercer
Chairperson
Torngat Joint Fisheries Board



Torngat Joint Fisheries Board
Memorandum to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Snow Crab Co-Management in 2HJN
(March 27, 2013)

Issue: Snow Crab Co-Management In and Adjacent to the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area.

Recommendations:

1. Decrease the TAC in 2HJN by 15% (55MT) to 312MT.

1.0 Background:

1.1 *The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board and the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement*

- The Torngat Joint Fisheries Board (TJFB or 'the Board') is established by Part 13.10 of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA or 'the Agreement'), with its roles, responsibilities and powers outlined in Part 13.11. The Board is the primary body making recommendations on the conservation and management of fish, fish habitat, and fisheries in the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area, and has advisory powers in waters adjacent to the 'Zone'. The TJFB has both the authority and the responsibility to make recommendations to the Minister in respect of issues surrounding the management of Snow Crab, as per 13.11.1 (a) and (b) of the LILCA.

1.2 *Snow Crab Management*

- Snow Crab management units are intended to distribute pressure. In 2012 Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization Divisions 2H South and 2J North were merged into a single management unit (2HJN).
- The TAC in 2HJN has declined from a recent high of 462MT in 2010 to 367MT in 2012. (In 2011 the TAC in 2H South was reduced from 100MT to 70MT; in 2012 the overall TAC in 2HJN was further reduced by 15%).
- The fishery in 2HJN is largely dependant on southern vessels through royalty arrangements. This is the only area where this is the case. Recent TAC reductions have had no effect on exploitation, as the TAC has not been taken for three consecutive years. In each year the fishery self-regulated and effort dropped to 0 when profitability dropped below a critical threshold.
- The percentage of the catch handled and released in the fishery increased from about 10% in 2008 to about 35% in 2012 implying a potential increase in pre-recruit mortality. This data is collected in 2J South and generalized to the entirety of

2HJN. There is no measure of the occurrence of soft-shell in 2HJN. A protocol was initiated in 2004 that closes localized areas when the percent soft-shelled crabs exceed 20% of the catch, however, there is concern over the efficacy of this protocol to minimize soft-shelled mortality. The Board has assessed handling practices and shared results and best practices with fishers through the 2011 Snow Crab Workshop and a handling brochure. The Board will continue to work with your Department and the Nunatsiavut Government to reduce handling mortality, with the understanding that pre-recruit mortality is managed through mitigating protocols first, and overall TAC reductions only when necessary.

- There are no established limit reference points or harvest control rules for the Snow Crab fishery, but Marine Stewardship Certification is moving management generally in this direction. For added clarity, there is no explicit decision rule which links observed changes in indicators to changes in the annual TACs and thus the required change in exploitation rate. But by way of analogy, harvest control rules limit TAC changes for Northern Shrimp to 15% biennially, and for Turbot to 5% annually. The Board will continue to work with the Nunatsiavut Government, your Department, and others to develop harvest control rules for Snow Crab.

1.3 *Status of the Resource and Environment*

- Our understanding of the status of the resource in 2HJN is derived from a post-season trawl survey, a post season trap survey in 2J South, and fishery performance indicators including catch, effort, and catch-per-unit effort (CPUE). In all cases, except catch, the indicators are collected in 2J South and generalized to 2HJN, or are collected in both areas but not disaggregated in subsequent analysis.
- The 2012 TAC in Area 2HJN was 367MT. Of this, 183MT (49.9%) was landed by 8 designates in 27 trips. Landings are not a reliable indicator of abundance in 2HJN.
- Catch-per-unit-effort has declined from 2008 to 2011, but was unchanged in 2012.
- The exploitable biomass estimated from the post season trawl survey declined from 2006 to 2011, but was unchanged in 2012.
- Recruitment declined from 2006 to 2011, but changed little in 2012.
- Environmental conditions are increasingly being seen as an important determinant of recruitment. Short and long-term recruitment prospects are poor due to a recent warm oceanographic regime.
- “Maintaining the current level of fishery removals would result in little change in the exploitation rate in 2013” (RAP 2013). This conclusion, like the analyses that informs it, is not specific to 2HJ North and 2J South, but is general to all of 2HJ.

2.0 Alternatives

2.1 Lesser Reduction (0-15%)

- The Board considered lesser and greater TAC reductions. A lesser TAC reduction (ranging from 0 to 15%) would likely have no more impact on exploitation than a greater one, if the fishery in 2HJN self-regulates, as it appears to have done in 2011 and 2012. However, recruitment prospects in the short and long-term, coupled with landings of approximately 50% in 2012, support a modest TAC reduction.

2.2 Greater Reduction (>15%)

- A greater TAC reduction is not supported by the key indicators. Catch-per-unit-effort, exploitable biomass estimates, and recruitment have all declined from highs mid-decade, but are largely unchanged from 2011 to 2012. In the absence of clear harvest control rules linking indicators with actions, a large TAC reduction (for our analyses, a reduction greater than 15%) is not warranted. Furthermore, a large TAC reduction would potentially undermine the entire fishing and processing sector in Nunatsiavut, making any future management questions effectively moot, irrespective of resource trends.

3.0 Key Considerations

- There are only two licence holders in 2HJN and the fishery is prosecuted, primarily, through lease arrangements. The ability and likelihood of in-season self-regulation, through the conscious decisions of managers, or fishers themselves, in response to fishery performance is high.
- The resource has declined from peaks mid-decade, but has changed little from 2011 to 2012.

4.0 Legislative and Policy Considerations:

- The Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement and the Fisheries Act provide the legal, constitutional and policy context to the supplied recommendation.

5.0 Consultations and Meetings on Northern Shrimp

- The TJFB has organized a Snow Crab Workshop each year since 2009. In 2012 the workshop brought together fishers, processors, researchers and managers to consider the status of the resource and possible management actions. The

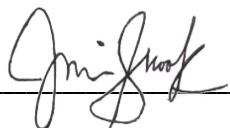


recommended decrease of 15% is consistent with the understandings and direction that emerged from that process.

- The Board also attends the Department's Regional Advisory Processes annually.
- The Board meets quarterly and Snow Crab is an Agenda item at each meeting. This decision emerged from meetings held in Happy Valley – Goose Bay on March 19-20th, 2013. The Board consulted with officials of the Nunatsiavut Government and your Department on March 20th, 2013, to consider this recommendation

Prepared by: Torngat Wildlife, Plants and Fisheries Secretariat

Approved by: _____ Chairperson

Approved by:  Executive Director