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Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization

Report of the Scientific Council Meeting

27 May -11 June 2021
By correspondence

NAFO
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

2021

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REPORT OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEETING
27 May -11 June 2021

Chair: Carmen Fernández Rapporteur: Tom Blasdale

I. PLENARY SESSIONS

The Scientific Council (SC) met by correspondence from 27 May to 11 June 2021 to consider the various matters in its agenda. Representatives attended from Canada, Denmark (in respect of Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Japan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Observers from the Ecology Action Centre, Sustainable Fisheries Greenland, and Oceans North were also present. The Executive Secretary, Scientific Council Coordinator and other members of the Secretariat were in attendance.

The Executive Committee met prior to the opening session of the Council to discuss the provisional agenda and plan of work.

The Council was called to order at 08:00 Halifax time (11:00 UTC) on 27 May 2021. The provisional agenda was **adopted** and the Scientific Council Coordinator was appointed the rapporteur. The opening session was adjourned at 12:30 on 27 May 2021.

Several sessions were held throughout the course of the meeting to deal with specific items on the agenda.

Because of having to meet by correspondence, with participants located in many different time zones, it was only possible to meet (by WebEx) from 08:00 to 13:00 (Halifax time), and this limited the amount of work that could be achieved in the meeting.

The concluding session was called to order at 08:00 on 11 June 2021.

The Council considered and **adopted** the Scientific Council Report of this meeting of 27 May -11 June 2021. The Chair received approval to leave the report in draft form for about two weeks to allow for minor editing and proof-reading on the usual strict understanding there would be no substantive changes.

The meeting was adjourned at 13:00 h on 11 June 2021.

The limitations of meeting by correspondence also implied that the reports of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Science (STACFIS) could only be formally **adopted** by correspondence, at a later date in July 2021. This report is included as Appendix IV.

For the same reason, the reports of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Environment (STACFEN), the Standing Committee on Research Coordination (STACREC) and the Standing Committee on Publications (STACPUB), Appendices I-III, were deferred until September.

The Agenda, List of Research (SCR) and Summary (SCS) Documents, and List of Representatives, Advisers and Experts, are given in Appendices V-IX.

The Council's considerations on the Standing Committee Reports, and other matters addressed by the Council follow in Sections II-XV.

II. REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS IN 2020

Recommendations from 2020 are considered in the relevant sections of this report.

III. FISHERIES ENVIRONMENT

The Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Environment (STACFEN) is deferred until the September meeting of SC.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

The Report of the Standing Committee on Publications (STACPUB) is deferred until the September meeting of SC.

V. RESEARCH COORDINATION

The Report of the Standing Committee on Research Coordination (STACREC) is deferred until the September meeting of SC.

VI. FISHERIES SCIENCE

The Council intends to **adopt** the Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Science (STACFIS; Chair Katherine Sosebee), by correspondence in July 2021. Once adopted, the full report of STACFIS will be in Appendix IV.

VII. MANAGEMENT ADVICE AND RESPONSES TO SPECIAL REQUESTS

1. The NAFO Commission

The Commission requests are given in Annex 1.

For Northern shrimp in Division 3M, northern shrimp in Divisions 3LNO and northern shrimp in Subarea 1 and Div. 0A, advice for 2022 will be drafted during a WebEx scheduled for 8-14 September 2021 (however, it is noted that some change in these dates may occur). There will be an additional NIPAG meeting by WebEx in November 2021 to assess northern shrimp in Denmark Strait and off East Greenland.

a) Request for Advice on TACs and Other Management Measures

The Fisheries Commission at its meeting of September 2010 reviewed the assessment schedule of the Scientific Council and, with the concurrence of the Coastal States, agreed to request advice for certain stocks on either a two-year or three-year rotational basis. In recent years, thorough assessments of certain stocks have been undertaken outside of the assessment cycle either at the request of the Commission or by the Scientific Council given recent stock developments.

The Scientific Council advice for stocks fully assessed during this meeting follows below.

Cod in Division 3M

Advice June 2021 for 2022

Recommendation for 2022

Scientific Council notes that the strong year-classes of 2009 to 2011 are dominant in the current SSB. Subsequent recruitments are much lower; therefore, substantial declines in stock size are occurring and expected to continue in the very near future under any fishing scenario.

Yield of less than or equal to 5 000 tonnes in 2022 results in a very low probability (≤10%) of SSB being below B_{lim} in 2023 and a very low probability of exceeding F_{lim}. However, given the present low level of the SSB and projected decline of total biomass under any fishing scenario, in order to promote growth in SSB, SC advises catches of no more than 3 000 tonnes in 2022.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives have been defined by the Commission. Convention General Principles are applied.

Convention objectives	***Status***	***Comment/consideration***
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🟡	Stock above B_{lim} in 2021. B_{msy} is unknown
Eliminate overfishing	🟢	$F<F_{lim}$ in 2020
Apply Precautionary Approach	🟢	F_{lim} and B_{lim} defined
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟡	VME closures in effect, no specific measures
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

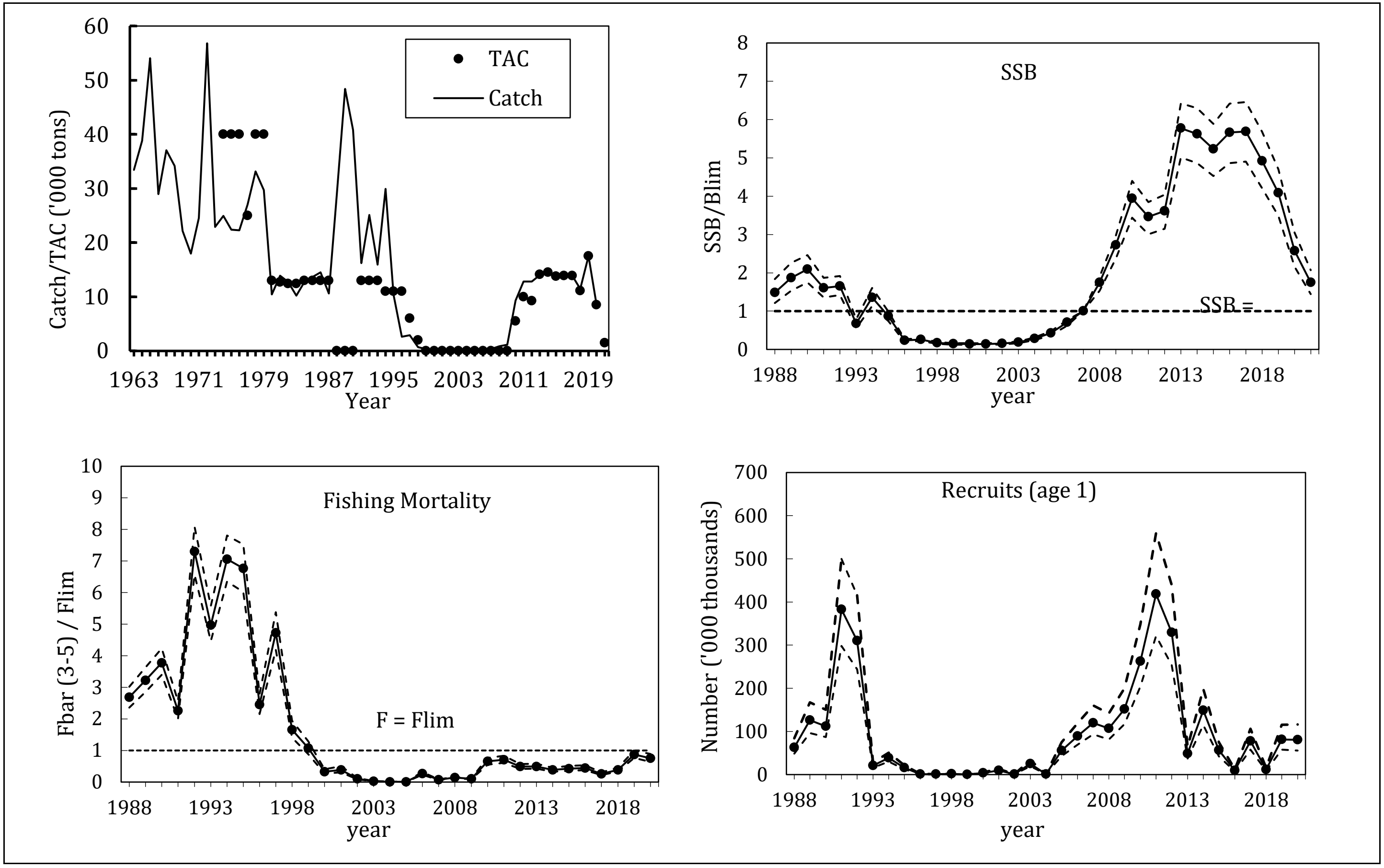
🟢 OK
🟡 Intermediate
🔴 Not accomplished
⚪ Unknown

Management unit

The cod stock in Flemish Cap (NAFO Div. 3M) is considered to be a separate population.

Stock status

SSB has been declining rapidly since 2017 but is still estimated to be above B_{lim} (median 15 408 t). This decline is expected to continue in the next couple of years due to poor recruitment between 2015 and 2018. Fishing mortality has remained below F_{lim} (median 0.196) since the fishery reopened in 2010. However, in 2019 and 2020 it increased substantially and is now close to F_{lim}.



Reference points

$B_{lim} = SSB_{2007}$: Median = 15 408 tonnes of spawning biomass (Scientific Council, 2021).

$F_{lim} = F_{30\%SPR}$: Median = 0.196 (Scientific Council, 2021).

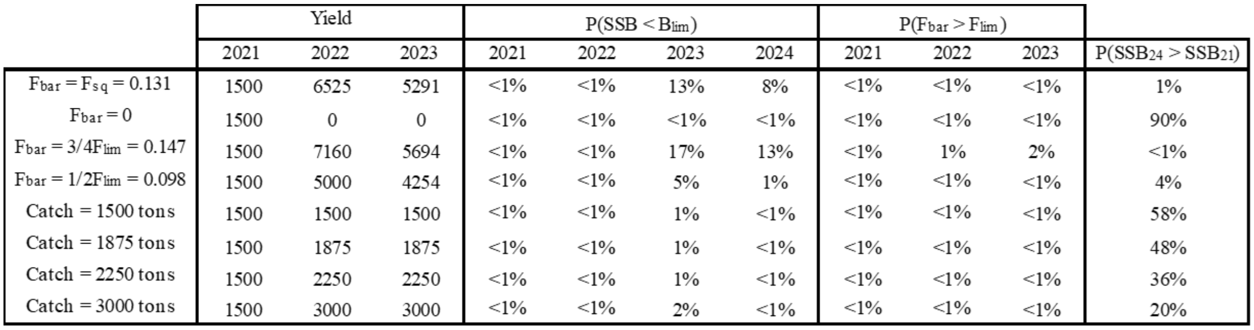
Projections

Although advice is given only for 2022, projection results are shown to 2024 to illustrate the medium-term implications. F_{bar} is the mean of the F at ages 3-5 and used as the indicator of overall fishing mortality; F_{sq} is the status quo F, calculated as the mean of the last three years F_{bar} (2018-2020).

Table 1.

	B		SSB		Yield
	Median and 80% CI				
F_{bar} = Fsq (median = 0.131)					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	6525
2023	34733	(29703 - 40345)	18598	(15605 - 21773)	5291
2024	29999	(24718 - 36318)	19822	(16344 - 23723)	
F_{bar} = 0					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	0
2023	41143	(36076 - 46765)	24071	(21037 - 27322)	0
2024	42102	(36620 - 48376)	30514	(27027 - 34628)	
F_{bar} = 3/4F_{lim} (median = 0.147)					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	7160
2023	34111	(29091 - 39726)	18092	(15086 - 21246)	5694
2024	28966	(23642 - 35277)	18923	(15516 - 22770)	
F_{bar} = 1/2F_{lim} (median = 0.098)					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	5000
2023	36238	(31192 - 41834)	19854	(16887 - 23067)	4254
2024	32578	(27213 - 38900)	22092	(18612 - 25996)	
Catch = 1500 tons					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	1500
2023	39661	(34603 - 45288)	22807	(19826 - 26087)	1500
2024	38994	(33591 - 45246)	27691	(24211 - 31752)	
Catch = 1875 tons					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	1875
2023	39291	(34238 - 44913)	22482	(19454 - 25735)	1875
2024	38216	(32795 - 44488)	27028	(23511 - 31085)	
Catch = 2250 tons					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	2250
2023	38923	(33871 - 44544)	22151	(19150 - 25412)	2250
2024	37438	(32028 - 43736)	26354	(22862 - 30373)	
Catch = 3000 tons					
2021	45787	(40635 - 51559)	27058	(23458 - 31446)	1500
2022	42969	(37884 - 48389)	24420	(21335 - 27970)	3000
2023	38196	(33139 - 43808)	21520	(18528 - 24739)	3000
2024	35865	(30453 - 42155)	24986	(21477 - 28888)	

Table 2.



	Yield			$P(SSB < B_{lim})$				$P(F_{bar} > F_{lim})$			
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	$P(SSB_{24} > SSB_{21})$
$F_{bar} = F_{sq} = 0.131$	1500	6525	5291	<1%	<1%	13%	8%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
$F_{bar} = 0$	1500	0	0	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	90%
$F_{bar} = 3/4F_{lim} = 0.147$	1500	7160	5694	<1%	<1%	17%	13%	<1%	1%	2%	<1%
$F_{bar} = 1/2F_{lim} = 0.098$	1500	5000	4254	<1%	<1%	5%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	4%
Catch = 1500 tons	1500	1500	1500	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	58%
Catch = 1875 tons	1500	1875	1875	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	48%
Catch = 2250 tons	1500	2250	2250	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	36%
Catch = 3000 tons	1500	3000	3000	<1%	<1%	2%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	20%

The results indicate that under all scenarios with $F_{bar}>0$, total biomass during the projected years will decrease, whereas the SSB is projected to increase slightly in 2024 (Table 1). The probability of SSB being below B_{lim} in 2023 is high (≥13%) in the scenarios with $F_{bar}=F_{sq}$ and $F_{bar}=3/4F_{lim}$, while being very low (≤10%) in the rest of the cases (Table 2). The probability of SSB in 2024 being above that in 2021 ranges between <1% and 90%, depending on the scenario.

Under all scenarios, the probability of F_{bar} exceeding F_{lim} is less than or equal to 2% in 2022 and 2023.

SC notes that projected values of risk, in particular more than one year ahead (Table 2), will be inherently more uncertain than the projected median stock sizes (Table 1). The risks are typically derived from the tails of a probability distribution which are less precisely estimated compared to the median (centre) of the same distribution.

Assessment

A Bayesian SCAA model, introduced at the 2018 benchmark, was used as the basis for the assessment of this stock with data from 1988 to 2020.

The next full assessment for this stock will be in 2022.

Human impact

Mainly fishery related mortality. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biological and environmental interactions

Redfish, shrimp and smaller cod are important prey items for cod. Recent studies indicate strong trophic interactions between these species in the Flemish Cap.

Fishery

Cod is caught in directed trawl and longline fisheries and as bycatch in the directed redfish fishery by trawlers. The fishery is regulated by quota. New technical regulations were introduced in 2021, in particular a closure of the directed fishery in the first quarter as well as sorting grids to protect juveniles.

Recent catch estimates and TACs (‘000 tonnes) are as follows:

,000 tons	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TAC	5.5	10.0	9.3	14.1	14.5	13.8	13.9	13.9	11.1	17.5	8.5	1.5
STATLANT 21	5.2	10.0	9.1	13.5	14.4	12.8	13.8	13.9	10.5	13.0	8.5	
STACFIS	9.3	12.8	12.8	14.0	14.3	13.8	14.0	13.9	11.5	17.5	8.5	

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

General impacts of fishing gear on the ecosystem should be considered. A large area of Div. 3M has been closed to protect sponge, sea pens and coral.

Special comment

The stock continues to decline and is expected to be at very low levels during the next few years.

Sources of information

SCS Doc. 21/05, 21/10, 21/13 and SCR Doc. 21/05, 21/17.

Redfish (*Sebastes mentella* and *Sebastes fasciatus*) in Division 3M Advice June 2021 for 2022 – 2024

Recommendation for 2022 and 2023

SC advises that catches do not exceed $F_{0.1}$ level, given the life history of the stock. This corresponds to a TAC of 10 933 t in 2022 and 11 171 t in 2023.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives defined by Fisheries Commission. Convention General Principles are applied.

Convention objectives	***Status***	***Comment/consideration***
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	○	B_{msy} unknown. Stock above historical average level
Eliminate overfishing	🔴	F_{msy} unknown. Catch at a low level over past 25 years.
Apply Precautionary Approach	🔴	Candidate yield per recruit reference points available and used, but need to be confirmed.
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟡	VME closures in effect, no specific measures, low bycatch reported.
Preserve marine biodiversity	○	Cannot be evaluated

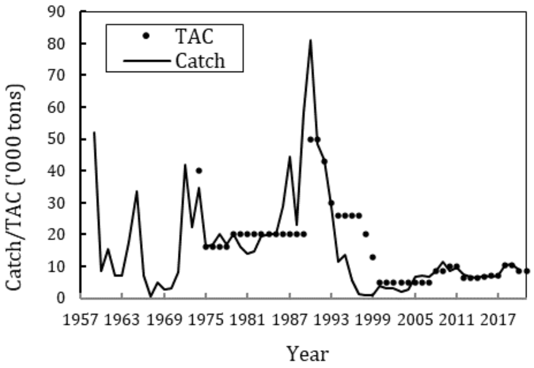
🟢	OK
🟡	Intermediate
🔴	Not accomplished
○	Unknown

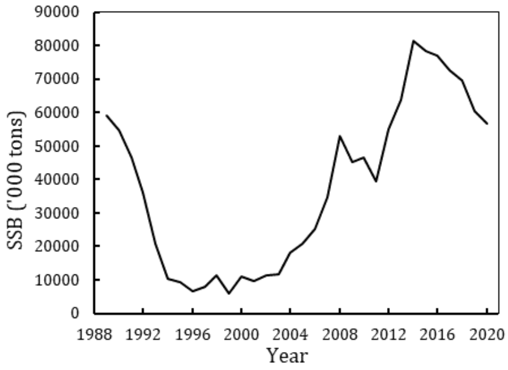
Management unit

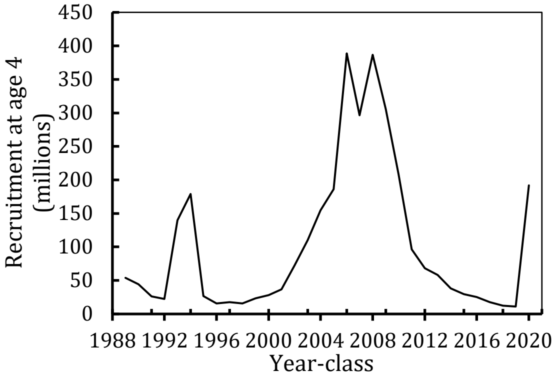
Catches of redfish in Div. 3M include three species of the genus *Sebastes; S. mentella, S. norvegicus* (=*S. marinus*) and *S. fasciatus*. For management purposes, they are considered as one stock. The assessment and advice are based on data for only two species (*S. mentella* & *S. fasciatus*), labeled as beaked redfish. The TAC advice is adjusted to reflect all three species on the Flemish Cap, based upon the relative species distribution in recent surveys.

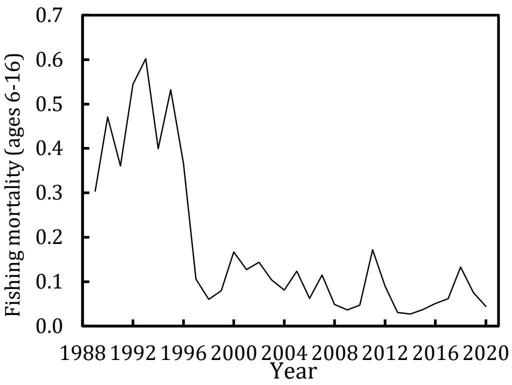
Stock status

SSB has declined continuously from its highest level in 2014. After an extended period of declining recruitment, the recruitment estimate for 2020 is high but associated with high uncertainty, and its magnitude needs to be confirmed in future assessments. Fishing mortality remains relatively low compared to the 1980s and 1990s.









Reference points

No reference points have been adopted.

Assessment

Input data comes from the EU Flemish Cap bottom trawl survey and the fishery. A quantitative model (XSA) introduced in 2003 was used. Increased natural mortality was assumed from 2006 to 2010, but natural mortality was low (more typical of redfish) in other years. There is no evidence that natural mortality has increased recently from the level of 0.1 adopted in the 2017 assessment, and therefore, the 2021 XSA assessment was run with average M from 2015 onwards kept at 0.1.

The next full assessment of this stock will be in 2023.

Projections

Short term (2022-2024) stochastic projections were carried out for female spawning stock biomass (SSB) and catch, under most recent level of natural mortality and considering five options for fishing mortality ($F_{0.1}$, F=M, $F_{statusquo}$, 1.25 TAC and 0.75 TAC). Projections assume that redfish catches (all species) in 2021 are equal to the redfish TAC ($F_{statusquo}$ is defined as the corresponding F). Recruitment entering in 2021 to 2023 is given by the geometric mean of the most recent recruitments (age 4 XSA, 2017-2019).

In all projection scenarios, the SSB is projected to decline, and to be at around the average for the assessment time-series (since the late 1980s) by 2024.

***F0.1* =0.0669**

	SSB Median and 80% CI	Yield	TAC
2021$_{deterministic}$	54264	8271	8448
2022	49021 (45226 - 54929)	10704	10933
2023	43311 (39721 - 48611)	10937	11171
2024	38147 (34488 - 43820)		

***F* =*M* =0.1**

	SSB Median and 80% CI	Yield	TAC
2021$_{deterministic}$	54264	8271	8448
2022	49021 (45226 - 54929)	15506	15837
2023	40898 (37522 - 45931)	14898	15217
2024	34029 (30695 - 39319)		

***FsqTAC* = 0.0558**

	SSB Median and 80% CI	Yield	TAC
2021$_{deterministic}$	54264	8271	8448
2022	49021 (45226 - 54929)	9027	9220
2023	44164 (40476 - 49546)	9415	9616
2024	39674 (35891 - 45447)		

1.25 TAC (*F* = 0.0644)

	SSB Median and 80% CI	Yield	TAC
2021$_{deterministic}$	54264	8271	8448
2022	49021 (45226 - 54929)	10339	10560
2023	43497 (39888 - 48815)	10610	10837
2024	38481 (34787 - 44163)		

0.75 TAC (*F* =0.0376)

	SSB Median and 80% CI	Yield	TAC
2021$_{deterministic}$	54264	8271	8448
2022	49021 (45226 - 54929)	6204	6337
2023	45578 (41810 - 51106)	6697	6840
2024	42303 (38374 - 48389)		

average beaked redfish proportion in the 2019-2020 3M redfish catch 0.979

	F0.1	F=M	Fsq	1.25 TAC	0.75 TAC
P(SSB$_{2022}$>SSB$_{2021}$)	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%
P(SSB$_{2023}$>SSB$_{2021}$)	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%
P(SSB$_{2024}$>SSB$_{2021}$)	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%	<10%

Human impact

Mainly fishery related mortality. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biology and Environmental Interactions

Since 2004 a rapid increase was observed on survey biomass both of golden (*Sebastes norvegicus*) and Acadian (*Sebastes fasciatus*) redfish stocks. Due to their shallower depth distributions, these two redfish species overlap with cod to an extent greater than deep sea redfish (*Sebastes mentella*). Since 2006, the cod stock started to recover, while those two redfish stocks declined sharply. Redfish is an important component in the diet of cod, especially in those years when successful recruitment events were observed in redfish stocks.

Fishery

Redfish is caught in directed bottom trawl fisheries at intermediate depths (300-700m), but also as bycatch in fisheries directed for cod and Greenland halibut. The fishery in NAFO Div. 3M is regulated by minimum mesh size and quota.

Recent catch estimates and TACs ('000 t) are as follows:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TAC	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.7	7.0	7.0	10.5	10.5	8.6	8.4
STATLANT 21	5.4	6.8	6.4	6.9	6.6	7.1	10.5	10.4	8.6	
STACFIS Total catch [1]	6.2	7.8	7.4	6.9	6.6	7.1	10.5	10.6	8.8	
STACFIS Catch [2]	6.3	5.2	4.6	5.2	6.2	6.9	10.3	10.2	8.7	

[1] STACFIS total catch on 2011-2014 based on the average 2006-2010 bias.

[2] STACFIS beaked redfish catch estimate, based on beaked redfish proportions on observed catch.

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

General impacts of fishing gears on the ecosystem should be considered. A large area of Div. 3M has been closed to protect sponge, sea pens and coral.

Sources of information: SCR Doc. 21/034 SCS Doc. 21/05, 06, 09,13

Cod in Divisions 3NO

Advice June 2021 for 2022 - 2024

Recommendation for 2022 – 2024

No directed fishing in 2022 to 2024 to allow for stock rebuilding. Bycatch of cod in fisheries targeting other species should be kept at the lowest possible level. Projections of the stock were not performed but given the poor strength of all year-classes subsequent to 2006, the stock will not reach B_{lim} in the next three years.

Management objectives

General Convention Principles are applied in conjunction with an Interim Conservation Plan and Rebuilding Strategy adopted in 2011 (NAFO/FC Doc. 11/22). The long-term objective of this plan is to achieve and to maintain the spawning stock biomass in the "safe zone" of the NAFO PA framework (FC Doc. 04/18), and at or near B_{msy}.

Convention objectives	***Status***	***Comment/consideration***
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🔴	$B < B_{lim}$
Eliminate overfishing	🟢	F is very low, $F < F_{lim}$
Apply Precautionary Approach	🟢	B_{lim} and F_{lim} established, no directed fishery.
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟢	No directed fishery
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

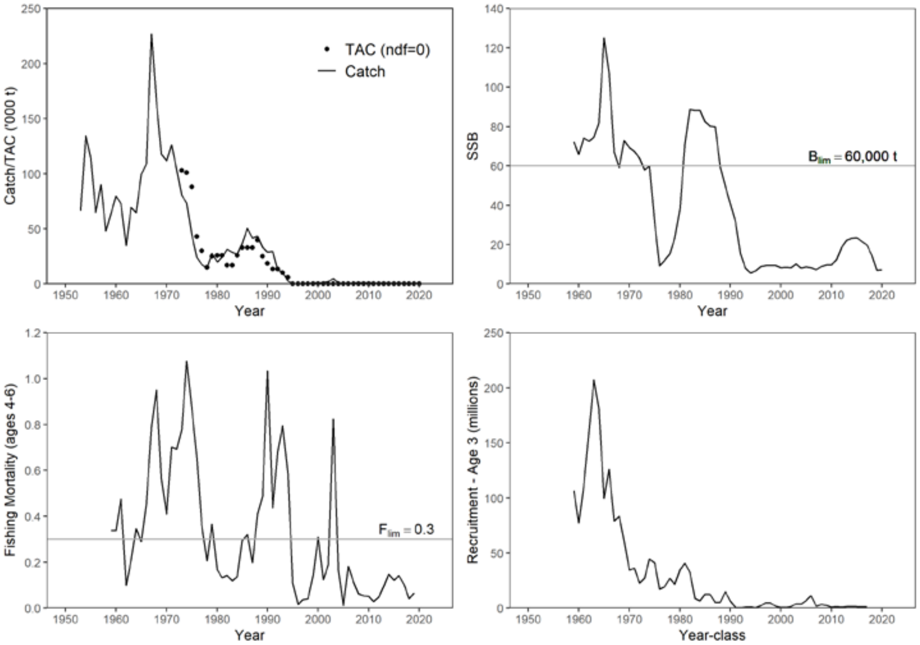
🟢	OK
🟡	Intermediate
🔴	Not accomplished
⚪	Unknown

Management unit

The stock occurs in Divs. 3NO, with fish occupying shallow parts of the bank, particularly the southeast shoal area (Div. 3N) in summer and on the slopes of the bank in winter.

Stock status

The spawning biomass increased noticeably between 2010 and 2015 but has subsequently declined sharply and the 2020 estimate of 7279 t represents only 12% of B_{lim} (60,000 t). The relatively strong 2006 year-class left the population after 2018, which had some influence on the most recent SSB estimates but did not influence overall stock status. Subsequent year-classes are much weaker, suggesting that the medium-term prospects for the stock are not good. Fishing mortality values over the past decade have been low and well below F_{lim} (0.3). Lack of catch-at-age data in 2020 prevented the estimation of stock size for 2021, however it should not be markedly different than the 2020 estimate.



Reference points

BB_{lim}:	60 000 t of spawning biomass (SC, 1999).
F_{lim} (=F_{msy}):	0.3 (SC, 2011).

Projections

Although projections of the stock were not performed because of various limitations identified with the assessment model, the poor strength of year-classes subsequent to 2006 suggests that the medium-term prospects for the stock are not good.

Assessment

A virtual population analysis model was used, and the results were consistent with the previous assessment. Input data comes from research surveys and commercial removals.

The next assessment is planned for 2024.

Human impact

Mainly bycatch related fishery mortality has been documented. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biology and Environmental interactions

Productivity of this stock was above average during the warm 1960s. During the cold 1990s, productivity was very low and surplus production was near zero. The Grand Bank (3LNO) Ecosystem Production Unit is currently experiencing low productivity conditions and biomass has declined across multiple trophic levels and stocks since 2014.

Fishery

A moratorium was implemented in 1994. Catches since that time are bycatch in other fisheries.

Recent catch estimates and TACs ('000 t) are as follows:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TAC	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf
STATLANT 21	0.7	1.1	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.3*	
STACFIS	0.7	1.1	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.6	

ndf: No directed fishery
*provisional

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

No specific information is available. There is no directed fishery for this stock. General impacts of fishing gears on the ecosystem should be considered. Areas of Divs. 3LNO have been closed to protect sponges and corals.

Special comments

The assessment model was accepted for stock status purposes, but a decision was made to not project the stock forward because of the limited age range (ages 2-12) considered in the model, as well as potential diagnostic issues (including directional retrospective patterns, trends in residuals in recent years). Limitations of the current assessment model suggest a need to explore more flexible models capable of dealing with uncertainty in model inputs (e.g., catch-at-age) and that do not impose assumptions about stationary natural mortality.

Sources of information

SCR Docs. 21/04; SCS Docs. 21/05, 06, 08, 09, 10, 13.

American plaice in Divisions 3LNO — Advice June 2021 for 2022 – 2024

Recommendation for 2022-2024

Scientific Council recommends that, in accordance with the rebuilding plan, there should be no directed fishing on American plaice in Div. 3LNO in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Bycatch of American plaice should be kept to the lowest possible level and restricted to unavoidable bycatch in fisheries directing for other species.

Management objectives

In 2011 FC adopted an "Interim 3LNO American Plaice Conservation Plan and Rebuilding Strategy" (FC Doc. 11/21). There is a Harvest Control Rule (HCR) in place for this stock.

Convention objectives	*Status*	*Comment/consideration*
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🔴	$B<B_{lim}$
Eliminate overfishing	🟡	No directed fishery, current bycatch are delaying recovery
Apply Precautionary Approach	🟢	Reference points defined
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟡	VME closures in effect, no specific measures.
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

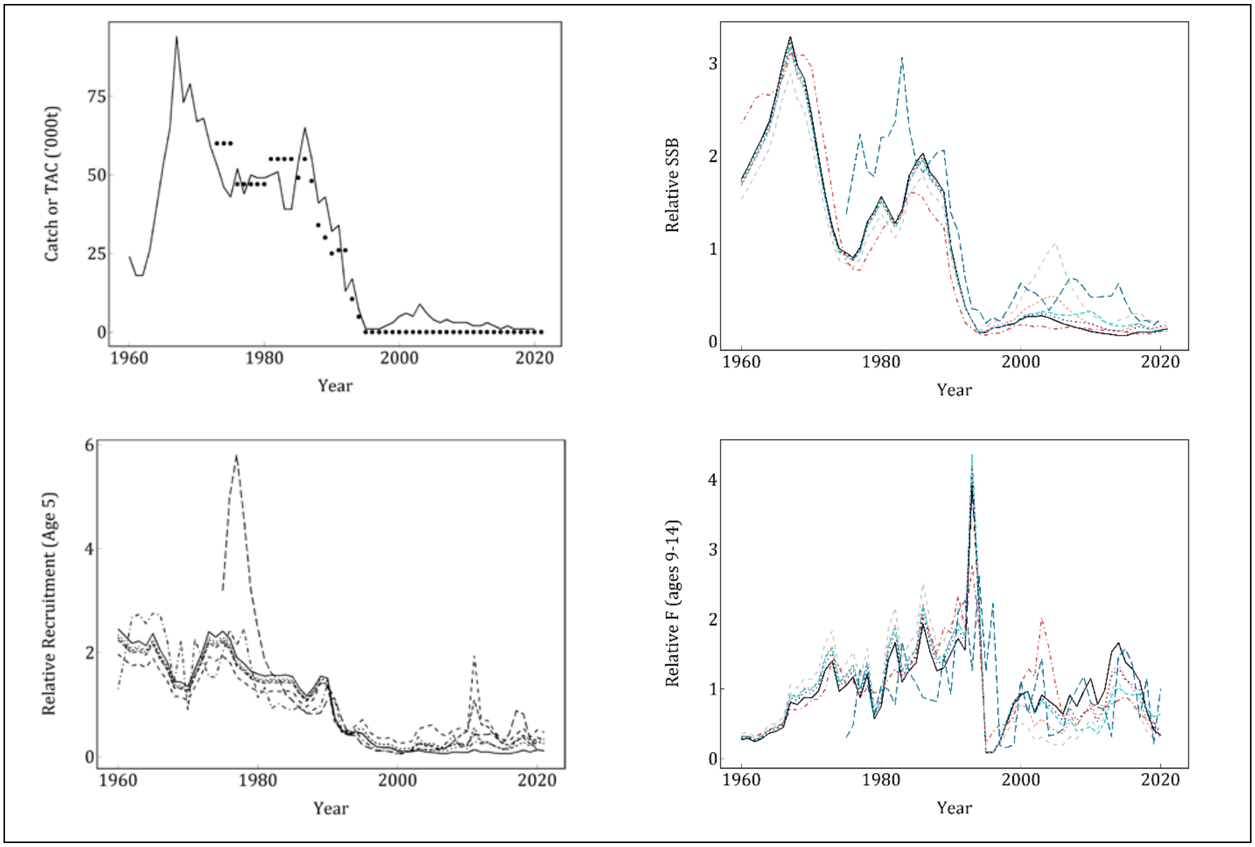
🟢	OK
🟡	Intermediate
🔴	Not accomplished
⚪	Unknown

Management unit

The management unit is NAFO Divisions 3LNO. The stock is distributed throughout Div. 3LNO but historically most of the biomass was found in Div. 3L.

Stock status

Fishing mortality increased from the late 1990s to 2015 and has subsequently declined. Recruitment has been very low in the last two decades. The stock remains low compared to historic levels and is presently considered to be below B_{lim}.



The multiple lines shown in the graphs correspond to alternate models and model formulations considered by SC. The black line indicates the base run of the ADAPT VPA.

Reference points

B_{lim}: 50 000 t of spawning biomass (Scientific Council Report, 2003).

Projections

Due to model instability, projections were not completed for this stock. There is considered to be low potential for stock growth.

Assessment

An analytical assessment using the ADAPTive framework tuned to the Canadian 3LNO spring, Canadian 3LNO autumn and the EU-Spain Div. 3NO survey is used for this stock. While results are considered by SC to indicative of stock trends, the absolute magnitude of population estimates from this model was not accepted by SC given a large retrospective pattern that consistently and significantly overestimates SSB and underestimates F. Several formulations of the ADAPT VPA with increases in the natural mortality assumption since at least 2005 were also considered. In addition, results of two independent populations models – a State-Space Model and a Spatial SURBA – were presented. Overall stock trends were consistent across models and support the conclusions of stock status from the base ADAPT.

The next full assessment is scheduled for 2024.

Human impact
Mainly fishery related mortality. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biological and environmental interactions
Capelin and sandlance as well as other fish and invertebrates are important prey items for American plaice. There has been a decrease in age at 50% maturity over time, possibly brought about by some interaction between fishing pressure and environmental/ecosystem changes. The Grand Bank (3LNO) Ecosystem Production Unit is currently experiencing low productivity conditions and biomass has declined across multiple trophic levels and stocks since 2014.

Fishery

The stock has been under moratorium since 1995. American plaice in recent years is caught as bycatch mainly in otter trawl fisheries of yellowtail flounder, skate and redfish.

Recent catch estimates and TACs are:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TAC	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf	ndf
STATLANT 21	1.3	2.2	1.4	1.1	1.7	1.2	0.8	1.2	1.1	
STACFIS	2.1[1]	3.0[1]	2.3[1]	1.1[2]	1.7[2]	1.2[3]	1.0[3]	1.2[3]	1.2[3]	

ndf No directed fishing.

[1] Catch was estimated using fishing effort ratio applied to 2010 STACFIS catch.

[2] Catch was estimated using STATLANT 21 data for Canadian fisheries and Daily Catch Records for fisheries in the NRA.

[3] STACFIS Catches since 2017 are obtained from CESAG

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

No specific information is available. There is no directed fishery for this stock. General impacts of fishing gears on the ecosystem should be considered. Areas within Divs. 3LNO have been closed to protect sponges and coral.

Special Comments

SC has identified a need to undertake a benchmark process to develop a new modelling framework for this stock.

From the early 2000s to around 2015, there was an increase in fishing mortality, and there is evidence of a concurrent increase in natural mortality. The combined impact of these factors is impeding recovery of this stock.

Sources of information

SCS Doc. 21/05, 06, 08; SCR Doc. 20/08, 13, 21/04, 10, 25; FC Doc. 11/21

Yellowtail flounder in Divisions 3LNO

Advice June 2021 for 2022 - 2024

Recommendation for 2022 to 2024

Scientific Council advises that fishing mortality up to 85% F_{msy}, corresponding to catches of 22 100 t, 20 800 t, and 19 900 t in 2022 to 2024 respectively, have risk of no more than 30% of exceeding F_{lim}, and are projected to maintain the stock above B_{msy}.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives are defined by the Commission. Convention General Principles are applied.

Convention objectives	***Status***	***Comment/consideration***
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🟢	B> B_{msy}
Eliminate overfishing	🟢	$F < F_{lim}$
Apply Precautionary Approach	🟢	Stock in safe zone of PA framework
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟡	Bycatch regulations in place for moratorium stocks, general VME closures in effect
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

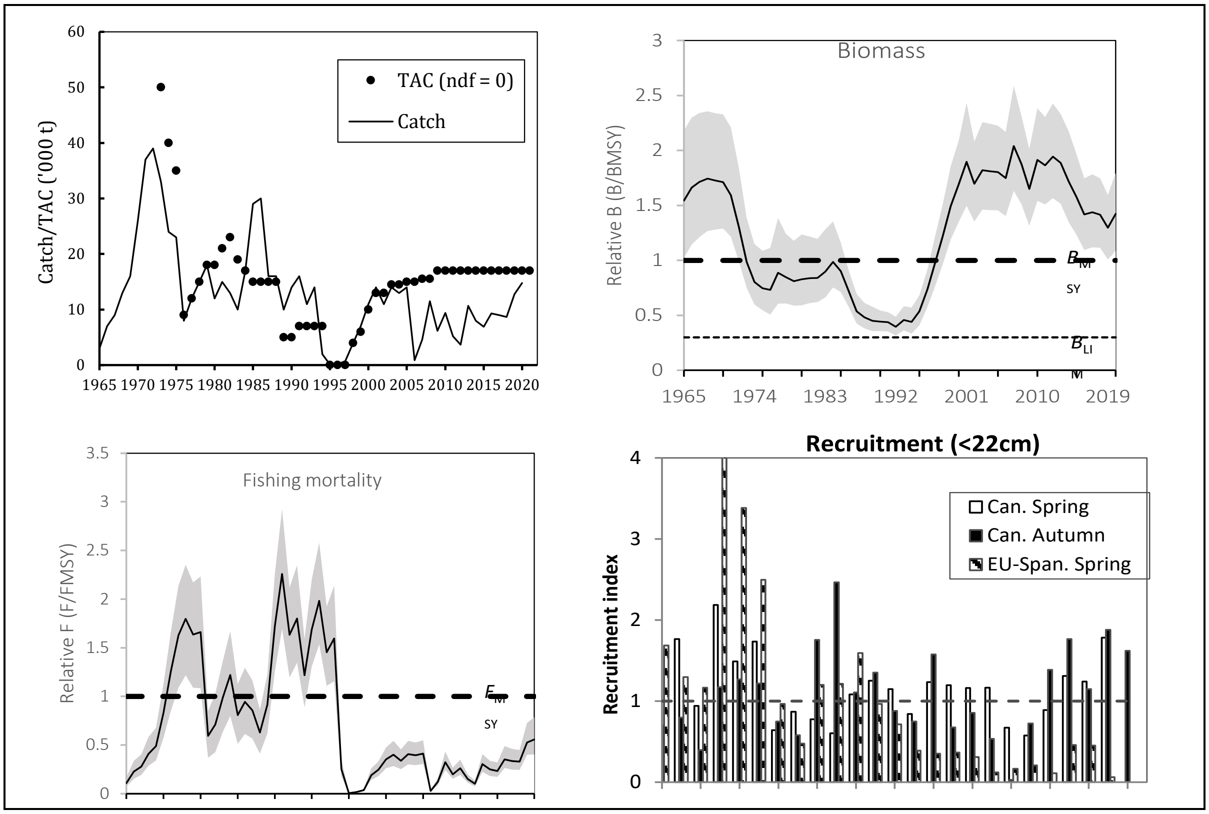
🟢 OK
🟡 Intermediate
🔴 Not accomplished
⚪ Unknown

Management unit

The management unit is NAFO Divisions 3LNO. The stock is mainly concentrated on the southern Grand Bank and is recruited from the Southeast Shoal area nursery ground.

Stock status

The stock biomass increased from 1994 to 2001, after which it remained stable until 2014. Biomass subsequently declined from ~2 times B_{msy} and is currently 1.4 times B_{msy} (B_{msy} = 89 790 tons). There is very low risk of the stock being below B_{msy} or F being above F_{msy}. Recent recruitment appears to be higher than average.



Reference points

B_{lim} is 30% B_{msy} and F_{lim} is F_{msy} (STACFIS 2004 p 133).

Projections

Medium-term projections were carried forward to the year 2025 with catch in 2021 assumed to be the TAC=17 000 t. Constant fishing mortality was applied from 2022-2025 at several levels of F (F=0, $F_{status\ quo}$, 2/3 F_{msy}, 85% F_{msy} and F_{msy}).

F_{msy} was estimated to be 0.21. Fishing at F_{msy} would first lead to a considerable yield in 2022, but yields are then projected to decline in the medium term with catch at 2/3 F_{msy}, 85% F_{msy} and F_{msy}. At the end of the projection period, the risk of biomass being below B_{lim} is less than 1% in all cases.

For the $F_{\text{status quo}}$ projections, probability that $F > F_{lim}=F_{msy}$ in 2022-2025 was less than 0.04 in the medium term. At 2/3 F_{msy}, the probability that $F > F_{lim}$ was between 0.08 and 0.11 in the medium term. Projected at the level of 85% F_{lim}, the probability that $F > F_{lim}$ ranges between 0.27 and 0.30 and for F_{msy} projections, this probability increased to 0.50. For biomass projections, in all scenarios for 2022-2025, the probability of biomass being below B_{lim} was less than 0.01. The probability that biomass in 2025 is greater than B_{2021} is 0.48, 0.41, 0.32 and 0.26 for projections of $F_{status\ quo}$, 2/3 F_{msy}, 85% F_{msy}, and F_{msy} respectively.

Projections with Catch$_{2021}$= TAC=17 000 t		
Year	Yield ('000t) median	Projected Relative Biomass(B/B_{msy}) median (90% CL)
F =0		
2022	0.00	1.39 (0.92, 1.97)
2023	0.00	1.56 (1.03, 2.18)
2024	0.00	1.69 (1.13, 2.32)
2025		1.78 (1.22, 2.41)
$F_{status\ quo}$ = 0.112		
2022	13.99	1.39 (0.92, 1.97)
2023	14.06	1.4 (0.91, 2)
2024	14.12	1.41 (0.89, 2.01)
2025		1.42 (0.88, 2.02)
2/3 F_{MSY} = 0.139		
2022	17.36	1.39 (0.92, 1.97)
2023	16.98	1.37 (0.87, 1.96)
2024	16.73	1.35 (0.83, 1.94)
2025		1.33 (0.8, 1.94)
85% F_{MSY} =0.177		
2022	22.11	1.39 (0.92, 1.97)
2023	20.77	1.31 (0.83, 1.9)
2024	19.92	1.26 (0.75, 1.85)
2025		1.22 (0.69, 1.83)
F_{MSY} =0.21		
2022	26.05	1.39 (0.92, 1.97)
2023	23.70	1.27 (0.79, 1.85)
2024	22.20	1.19 (0.68, 1.78)
2025		1.13 (0.59, 1.75)

	Yield ('000t)			$P(F>F_{lim})$				$P(B<B_{lim})$				$P(B<B_{MSY})$				
Catch$_{2021}$=17 000t	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025	$P(B_{2025}>B_{2021})$
F =0	0.00	0.00	0.00	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	9%	4%	2%	1%	82%
$F_{status\ quo}$ = 0.112	13.99	14.06	14.12	2%	3%	3%	4%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	9%	9%	10%	10%	48%
2/3 F_{MSY} = 0.139	17.36	16.98	16.73	8%	9%	10%	11%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	9%	11%	13%	15%	41%
85% F_{MSY} =0.177	22.11	20.77	19.92	27%	28%	29%	30%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	9%	14%	20%	24%	32%
F_{MSY} =0.209	26.05	23.70	22.20	50%	50%	50%	50%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	9%	18%	27%	34%	26%

Assessment

A Schaefer surplus production model in a Bayesian framework was used for the assessment of this stock. The results were comparable to the previous assessment. Input data comes from research surveys and the fishery. Next assessment: 2024.

Human impact
Mainly fishery related mortality has been documented. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biology and Environmental interactions
As stock size increased from the low level in the mid-90s, the stock expanded northward and continues to occupy this wider distribution. This expansion of the stock coincided with warmer temperatures.

Despite the increase in stock size observed since the mid-90s, the average length at which 50% of fish are mature has been lower for both males and females in the recent period. There also seems to have been a slight downward trend in weight at length since 1996. The cause of these changes is unknown.

The Grand Bank (3LNO) Ecosystem Production Unit (EPU) is currently experiencing low productivity conditions and biomass has declined across multiple trophic levels and stocks since 2014.

Fishery
Yellowtail flounder is caught in a directed trawl fishery and as bycatch in other trawl fisheries. The fishery is regulated by quota and minimum size restrictions. Catches in several years were low due to industry-related factors, but in recent years catches have increased and in 2019 and 2020 were 75% and 87% of the TAC respectively. American plaice and cod are taken as bycatch in the yellowtail fishery. There is a 15% bycatch restriction on American plaice and a 4% limit on cod.

Recent catch estimates and TACs (‘000 t) are as follows:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TAC	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
STATLANT 21	3.1	10.7	8.0	6.7	8.3	9.2	8.6	12.3	14.0	
STACFIS	3.1	10.7	8.0	6.9	9.3	9.2	8.7	12.8	14.8	

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem
Fishing intensity on yellowtail flounder has impacts on Div. 3NO cod and Div. 3LNO American plaice through bycatch. General impacts of fishing gears on the ecosystem should also be considered. Areas within Divs. 3LNO have been closed to protect sponge and coral.

Special comments
Management of yellowtail flounder should take into consideration impacts on other stocks. Bycatch in the yellowtail flounder fishery may be impeding recovery of Div. 3NO cod and American plaice in Div. 3LNO, which have both been below B_{lim} for many years and are currently experiencing reduced productivity conditions. Measures to reduce bycatch of American plaice in the yellowtail flounder fishery in particular, which currently has a 15% limit, could reduce the impact of fishing on the recovery of that stock. Such measures could include maintaining or reducing the yellowtail flounder TAC, reducing the bycatch limit, or seasonal closures in areas of high bycatch, in order to protect stocks in the collapsed zone.

Sources of information
SCR 20/09, 04, 21/18, 19; SCS 21/05, 06, 09, 13; NAFO/GC Doc 08/3 NAFO/FC 04/18

Capelin in Divisions 3NO

Advice June 2021 for 2022 - 2024

Recommendation for 2022-2024
No directed fishery.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives defined by the Commission. General Convention Principles (GC Doc. 08-03) are applied. Advice is based on qualitative evaluation of biomass indices in relation to historic levels.

Convention objectives	***Status***	***Comment/consideration***
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🔴	B_{msy} unknown, stock at low level
Eliminate overfishing	🟢	No directed fishery
Apply Precautionary Approach	⚪	Reference points not defined
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟢	VME closures in effect, no directed fishing
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

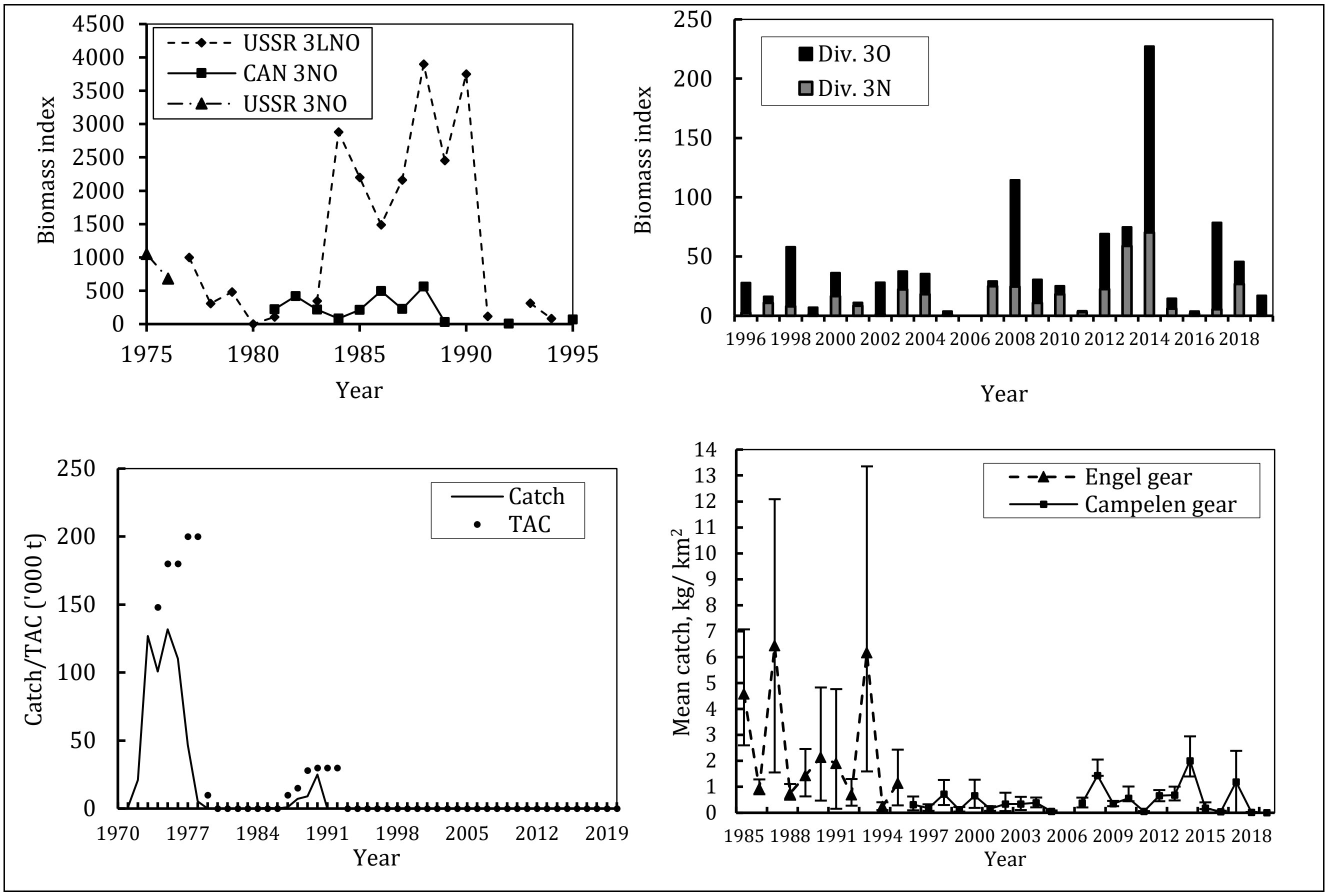
🟢	OK
🟡	Intermediate
🔴	Not accomplished
⚪	Unknown

Management unit

The capelin stock is distributed in Div. 3NO, mainly on the Grand Bank.

Stock status

Acoustic surveys series terminated in 1994 indicated a stock at a low level. Although biomass indices have increased in recent years, bottom trawl surveys are not considered a satisfactory basis for a stock assessment of a pelagic species.



Reference points
Not defined.
Projections
Quantitative assessment of risk at various catch options is not possible for this stock at this time.

Assessment
Assessment was based on evaluation of trends in acoustic survey data (1975 – 1994) and bottom trawl surveys (1995 – 2019: upper figure - Canadian surveys; lower figure – EU-Spain surveys). Bottom-trawling is not a satisfactory basis for a stock assessment of a pelagic species. The assessment is only sensitive to large-scale fluctuations in biomass and abundance. Therefore, although the next full assessment is in principle scheduled for 2024, SC recommends that this stock be monitored in future by interim monitoring reports only, until such time conditions change to warrant a full assessment.

Human impact
Low fishery related mortality due to moratorium and low bycatch in other fisheries. Other sources (e.g., pollution, shipping, oil industry) are considered minor.

Biological and environmental interactions
Changes in growth, maturity and recruitment are linked to temperature on the Grand Banks. The Grand Bank (3LNO) ecosystem production unit is currently experiencing low productivity conditions and biomass has declined across multiple trophic levels and stocks since 2014.

Fishery

Capelin has been fished in a directed trawl fishery. There is low bycatch in other trawl fisheries. The directed fishery was closed in 1992 and the closure has continued through 2020. No catches have been reported for this stock from 1993 except one tonne of Spanish catch in 2014 and five tonnes Estonian catch in 2016.

Recent catch estimates and TACs (t) are as follows:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
TAC	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*	ndf*
STATLANT 21	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0
STACFIS	-	-	-	-	0[1]	4[1]	11[2]	2[2]	2[2]	1[2]

*ndf - no directed fishing

[1] Catch was estimated using STATLANT 21 data for Canadian fisheries and Daily Catch Records for fisheries in the NRA.

[2] STACFIS Catches since 2017 are obtained from CESAG

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

No fishery.

Special comments

Bottom-trawling is not a satisfactory basis for a stock assessment of a pelagic species. Investigations to evaluate the status of capelin stock should utilize trawl acoustic surveys to allow comparison with historical time series.

Source of Information

SCR Doc. 21/029, SCS Doc. 21/06

White Hake in Divisions 3NO and Subdiv. 3Ps

Advice June 2021 for 2022-2023

Recommendation for 2022-2023

Given the absence of strong recruitment, catches of white hake in 3NO should not increase.

Average annual total catches of the most recent five years were around 400 tonnes.

Management objectives

No explicit management plan or management objectives defined by Fisheries Commission. General Convention Principles (NAFO/GC Doc 08/3) are applied. Advice is based on survey indices and catch trends in relation to estimates of recruitment.

Convention objectives	*Status*	*Comment/consideration*
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	⚪	B_{msy} unknown, stock at low level
Eliminate overfishing	⚪	F_{msy} unknown, fishing mortality is low
Apply Precautionary Approach	🔴	Reference points not defined
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	🟡	No specific measures, general VME closures in effect
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

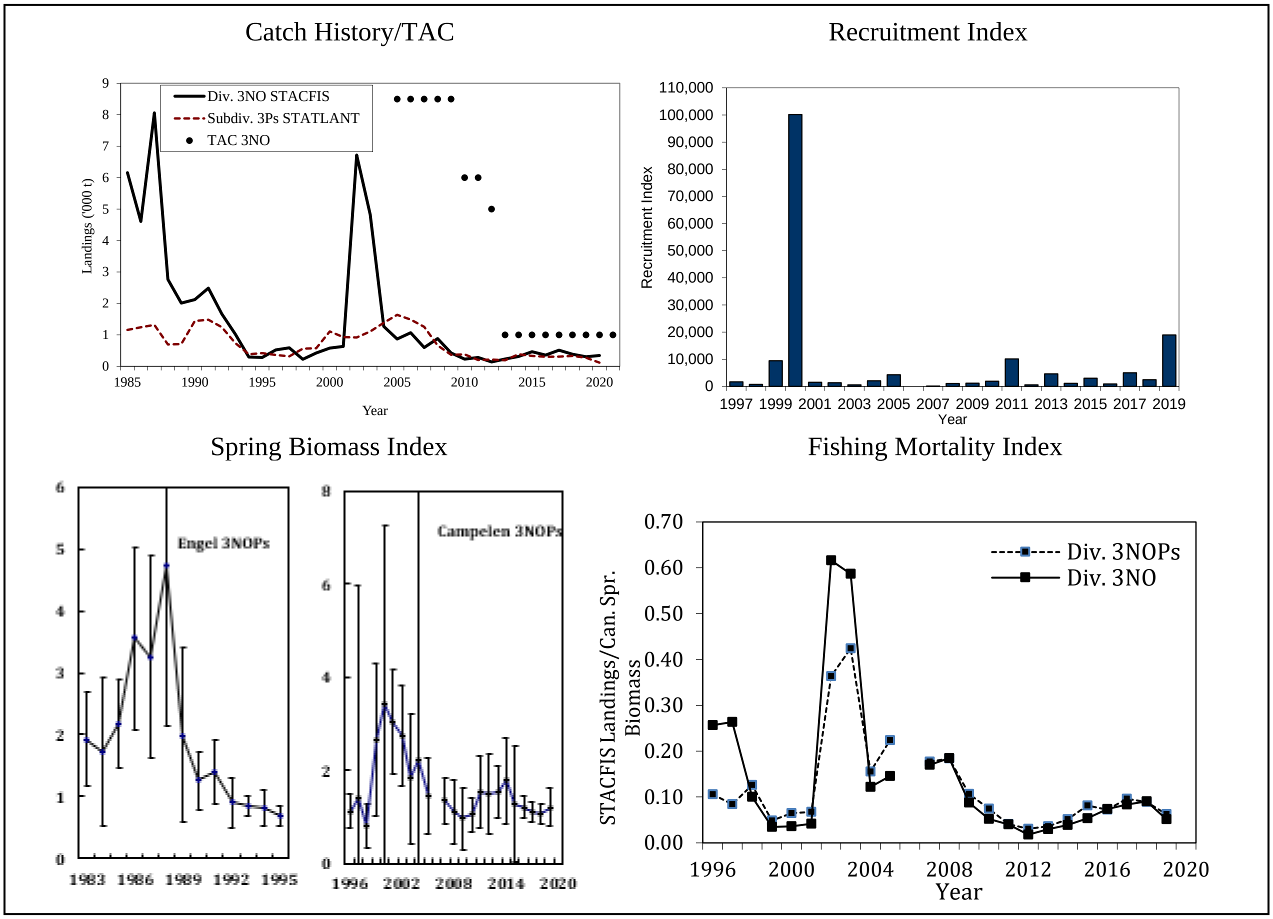
🟢	OK
🟡	Intermediate
🔴	Not accomplished
⚪	Unknown

Management unit

The management unit is confined to NAFO Div. 3NO, which is a portion of the stock that is distributed in NAFO Div. 3NO and Subdivision 3Ps.

Stock status

The assessment is considered data limited and is associated with a relatively high uncertainty. Biomass of this stock increased in 1999 and 2000, generated by the large recruitment observed in those years. Subsequently, the biomass index decreased and has since remained variable but lower. No large recruitments have been observed since 2000, however the 2019 index is the highest in two decades. Fishing mortality is low.



Reference Points

Not defined

Assessment

Based upon a qualitative evaluation of stock biomass trends and recruitment indices. The assessment is considered data limited and as such associated with a relatively high uncertainty. Input data are research survey indices and fishery data (STACFIS 2021).

The next full assessment of this stock will be in 2023.

Human impact

Mainly fishery related mortality has been documented. Mortality from other human sources (e.g. pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Biology and Environmental interactions

On the Grand Bank, white hake are near the northern limit of their range, concentrating along the southwest slope of the Grand Bank at temperatures above 5°C. The major spawning area is located on the shelf-edge on the Grand Bank. Weaker ocean currents on the continental slope during the spawning period are hypothesized to reduce potential losses of eggs and larvae due to entrainment in the Labrador Current and increase recruitment potential.

White hake feed mostly on crustaceans and fish. Larger individuals are reported to be cannibalistic and to feed upon eggs and juveniles. In nearshore areas, white hake are also thought to predate on smaller juvenile cod. Predators of white hake include Atlantic cod, other fish species, Atlantic puffins, Arctic terns, other seabirds and seals.

This stock straddles the 3Ps and 3LNO Ecosystem Production Units (EPU), which have been experiencing low productivity conditions in recent years, including biomass declines across multiple trophic levels and stocks in 3LNO since 2014.

Fishery

White hake is caught in directed gillnet, trawl and long-line fisheries. In directed white hake fisheries, Atlantic cod, black dogfish, monkfish and other species are landed as bycatch. In turn, white hake are also caught as bycatch in gillnet, trawl and long-line fisheries directing for other species. The fishery in NAFO division 3NO, and subdivision 3Ps, are regulated by quotas.

Recent catch estimates and TACs ('000 t) are:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Div. 3NO:										
TAC	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1[1]
STATLANT 21	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	
STACFIS	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3	
Subdiv. 3Ps:										
TAC							0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
STATLANT 21	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	

[1] May change in-season. See NAFO FC Doc. 19/01.

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

No specific information is available. General impacts of fishing gears on the ecosystem should be considered.

Special comments

No special comments.

Sources of Information

SCR Doc.20/010; 21/004, 022; SCS Doc. 21/05, 06, 08, 09

b) Monitoring of Stocks for which Multi-year Advice was Provided in 2018 or 2019

Interim monitoring for northern shortfin squid (*Illex illecebrosus*) in Subareas 3+4 will be carried out in September 2021. Interim monitoring updates of other stocks assessed in prior years were conducted and Scientific Council reiterates its previous advice as follows:

Recommendation for American Plaice in Division 3M for 2021 – 2023: The stock has recovered to the levels of the mid 1990s, when the fishery was closed. SC considers that there is not sufficient evidence that the stock would be able to sustain a fishery at this time and recommends that there be no directed fishing in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Bycatch should be kept at the lowest possible level.

Recommendation for redfish in Division 3O for 2020 – 2022: There is insufficient information on which to base predictions of annual yield potential for this resource. Stock dynamics and recruitment patterns are also poorly understood. Catches have averaged about 12 000 tonnes since the 1960s and over the long term, catches at this level appear to have been sustainable. Scientific Council is unable to advise on an appropriate TAC for 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Recommendation for witch flounder in Divisions 3NO for 2021 and 2022: There is more than a 10% probability of the stock being below B_{lim} in 2021 (11%). For 2022 and 2023 this probability ranges from 7% to 11% for scenarios with fishing mortality greater than zero. Advice is provided in the context of the NAFO Precautionary Approach framework which specifies that there should be a very low probability of being below B_{lim}.

SC considers that there is not sufficient evidence that the stock would be able to sustain a fishery at this time and recommends that there be no directed fishing in 2021 and 2022.

Recommendation for Thorny skate in Divisions 3LNO and Subdiv. 3Ps 2021 and 2022: The stock has been stable at recent catch levels (approximately 3511 tonnes, 2015 - 2019). However, given the low resilience of this species and higher historic stock levels, Scientific Council advises no increase in catches.

Recommendation for roughhead grenadier in Subareas 2 and 3: There will be no new assessment until monitoring shows that conditions have changed.

Recommendation for alfonsino in Division 6G for 2019 and beyond: The substantial decline in CPUE and catches on the Kükenthal Peak in the past year indicates that the stock may be depleted. SC advises to close the fishery until biomass increases to exploitable levels.

c) Special Requests for Management Advice

i) Request #2: Greenland halibut in SA2 + Divs. 3KLMNO: monitor, compute the TAC using the agreed HCR and determine whether exceptional circumstances are occurring

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to monitor the status of Greenland halibut in Subarea 2+Div. 3KLMNO annually to compute the TAC using the agreed HCR and determine whether exceptional circumstances are occurring. If exceptional circumstances are occurring, the exceptional circumstances protocol will provide guidance on what steps should be taken.

Scientific Council responded:

The TAC for 2022 derived from the HCR is 15 864 t. This is 4% lower than the 2021 TAC (16 498 t).

SC advises that Exceptional Circumstances are not occurring.

SC notes that the disruption of the 2021 Canadian Spring 3LNO survey, in addition to the years 2020 and 2017, will trigger Exceptional Circumstances next year.

An HCR for Greenland halibut in Subarea 2+Div. 3KLMNO was adopted by the Commission in 2017. The HCR has two components: target based and slope based. The full set of control parameters for the adopted HCR are shown in **Table i.1** with a starting TAC of 16 500 t in 2018. All data inputs used to calculate the TAC for 2022 are shown in **Table i.2**.

*Target based (**t**)*
The target harvest control rule (HCR) is:

$$\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{target} = \mathrm{TAC}_y(1 + \gamma(J_y - 1)) \qquad (1)$$

where TAC_y is the TAC recommended for year y, γ is the “response strength” tuning parameter, J_y is a composite measure of the immediate past level in the mean weight per tow from surveys (I_y^i) that are available to use for calculations for year y; five survey series are used, with i = 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 corresponding respectively to Canada Fall 2J3K, EU 3M 0-1400m, Canada Spring 3LNO, EU-Spain 3NO and Canada Fall 3LNO:

$$J_y = \sum_{i=1}^{5} \frac{1}{\sigma^{i^2}} \frac{J_{current,y}^i}{J_{target}^i} \Big/ \sum_{i=1}^{5} \frac{1}{\sigma^{i^2}} \qquad (2)$$

with $(\sigma^i)^2$ being the estimated variance for index i (estimated in the SCAA model fitting procedure),

$$J_{current,y}^i = \frac{1}{q} \sum_{y'=y-q}^{y-1} I_{y'}^i \qquad (3)$$

$$J_{target}^i = \alpha \frac{1}{5} \sum_{y'=2011}^{2015} I_{y'}^i \quad \text{(where } \alpha \text{ is a control/tuning parameter for the MP)} \qquad (4)$$

and q indicating the period of years used to determine current status. Note the assumption that when a TAC is set in year y for year $y + 1$, indices will not at that time yet be available for the current year y. Missing survey values are treated as missing in the calculation using the rule, as was done in the MSE. In such cases, q in equation (3) is reduced accordingly.

*Slope based (**s**)*
The slope harvest control rule (HCR) is:

$$\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{slope} = \mathrm{TAC}_y[1 + \lambda_{up/down}(s_y - X)] \qquad (5)$$

where $\lambda_{up/down}$ and X are tuning parameters, s_y^i is a measure of the immediate past trend in the survey-based mean weight per tow indices, computed by linearly regressing lnI_y^i, vs year y' for $y' = y - 5$ to $y' = y - 1$, for each of the five surveys considered, with

$$s_y = \sum_{i=1}^{5} \frac{1}{(\sigma^i)^2} s_y^i / \sum_{i=1}^{5} \frac{1}{(\sigma^i)^2} \qquad (6)$$

with the standard error of the residuals of the observed compared to model-predicted logarithm of survey index i (σ^i) estimated in the SCAA base case operating model. Missing survey values are treated as missing in the calculation using the rule, as was done in the MSE. In such cases, the slope in equation (6) is calculated from the available values within the last five years.

Combination Target and Slope based ***(s+t)***
For the target and slope based combination:

1) $\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{target}$ is computed from equation (1),
2) $\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{slope}$ is computed from equation (5), and
3) $\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1} = (\mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{target} + \mathrm{TAC}_{y+1}^{slope})/2$

Finally, constraints on the maximum allowable annual change in TAC are applied, viz.:

$$\text{if} \quad \mathrm{TAC}_{y+1} > \mathrm{TAC}_y\left(1 + \Delta_{up}\right) \quad \text{then} \quad \mathrm{TAC}_{y+1} = \mathrm{TAC}_y\left(1 + \Delta_{up}\right) \qquad (7)$$

and

$$\text{if} \quad \mathrm{TAC}_{y+1} < \mathrm{TAC}_y(1 - \Delta_{\mathrm{down}}) \quad \text{then} \quad \mathrm{TAC}_{y+1} = \mathrm{TAC}_y(1 - \Delta_{\mathrm{down}}) \qquad (8)$$

During the MSE process, this inter-annual constraint was set at 10%, for both TAC increases and decreases, and these constraints were adopted as part of the adopted HCR.

Table i.1. Control parameter values for the adopted HCR. The parameters α and X were adjusted to achieve a median biomass equal to B_{msy} for the exploitable component of the resource biomass in 2037 for the Base Case SCAA Operating Model.

TAC_{2018}	16 500 t
γ	0.15
q	3
α	0.972
λ_{up}	1
λ_{down}	2
X	-0.0056
Δ_{up}	0.1
Δ_{down}	0.1

Table i.2 Data used in the calculation of the TAC for 2022. The weights given to each survey in obtaining composite indices of abundance (target rule) and composite trends (slope rule) are proportional to the inverses of the squared values of the survey error standard deviations σ^i listed below.

	Canada Fall 2J3K	**Canada Fall 3LNO**	**Canada Spring 3LNO**	**EU-Spain 3NO**	**EU 3M 0-1400m**
2011	26.736	2.206	1.046	7.093	26.152
2012	23.504	1.712	1.941	7.373	19.198
2013	29.645	2.589	0.730	5.463	19.110
2014	33.336		0.664	6.239	23.921
2015	22.290	0.869		9.486	47.517
2016	18.541	1.314	0.658	8.796	28.298
2017	15.104	1.246		16.627	42.665
2018	17.054	1.887	1.884	7.875	29.803
2019	16.285	1.872	1.446	8.824	16.887
2020	15.840	2.714			13.230
s^i_{2021}	-0.0240	0.1859	0.2998	-0.0738	-0.2447
$J^i_{\text{current, 2021}}$	16.393	2.158	1.665	8.350	19.973
J^i_{target}	26.343	1.792	1.065	6.931	26.418
σ^i	0.220	0.260	0.490	0.380	0.210
		TAC_{2021}	16 498 t	TAC^t_{2022}	16 264 t
		s_{2021}	-0.0369	TAC^s_{2022}	15 464 t
		J_{2021}	0.905	TAC_{2022}	15 864 t

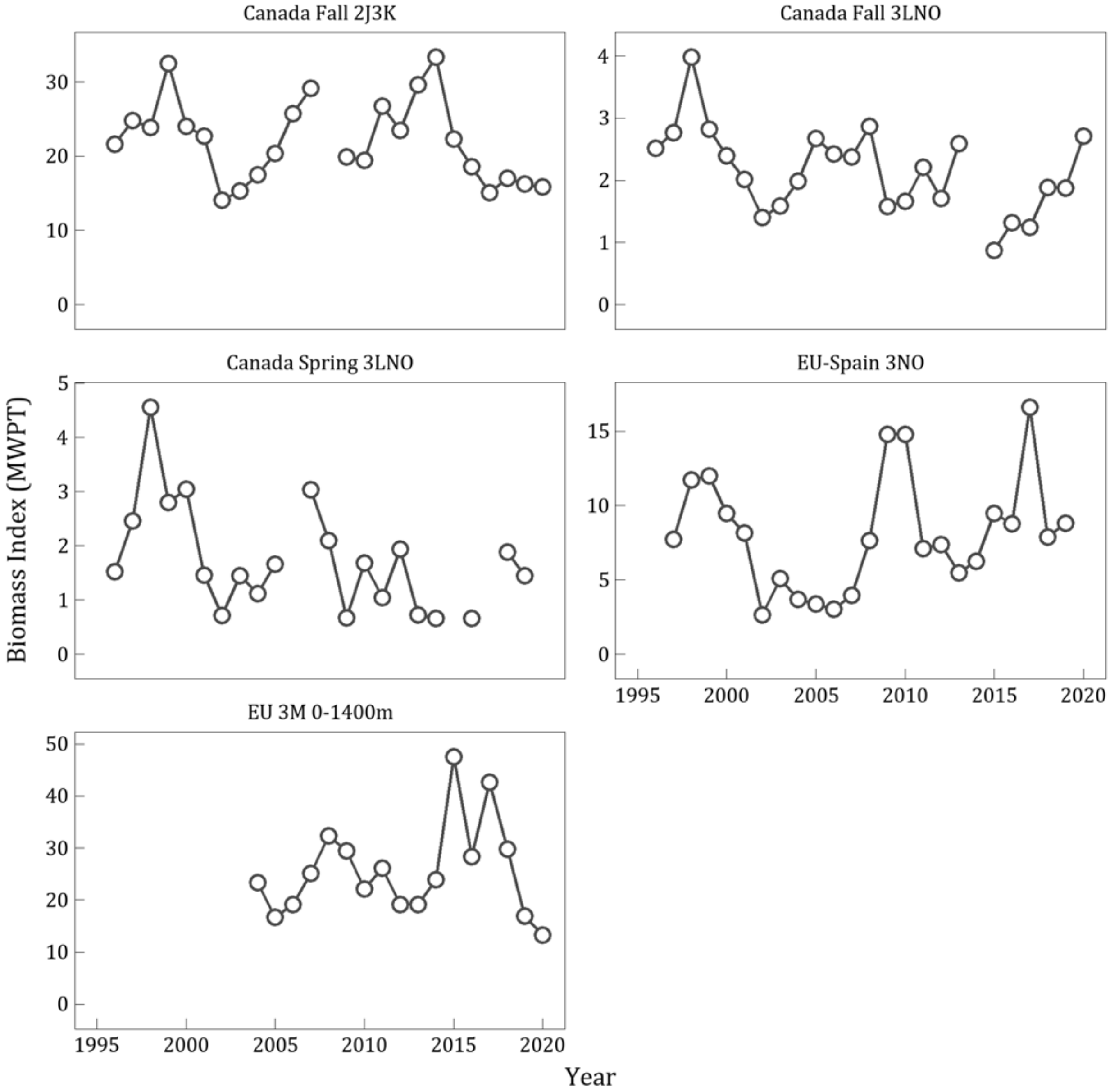


Figure. i.1. Input for the Greenland Halibut in Subarea 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO Harvest Control Rule. Survey data come from Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 2J3K, Canadian spring surveys in Divs. 3LNO, Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 3LNO, EU Flemish Cap surveys (to 1400m depth) in Div. 3M and EU-Spain surveys in 3NO. Missing values within the last five years are not used in the calculation of the TAC using the HCR.

Exceptional Circumstances

In 2021, the SC evaluated each of the criteria indicated in the Exceptional Circumstances Protocol, as described below.

The following criteria constitute Exceptional Circumstances:

1. *Missing survey data:*

- *More than one value missing, in a five-year period, from a survey with relatively high weighting in the HCR (Canadian Fall 2J3K, Canadian Fall 3LNO, and EU 3M surveys);*
- *More than two values missing, in a five-year period, from a survey with relatively low weighting in the HCR (Canadian Spring 3LNO and EU-Spain 3NO surveys);*

The Canadian Spring 3LNO and the EU-Spain 3NO surveys were not conducted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic and past survey issues, each survey series contains sufficient values, as defined under the Exceptional Circumstances Protocol, to compute the TAC for 2022 using the HCR. Therefore, this does not constitute Exceptional Circumstances this year.

SC notes that the disruption of the 2021 Canadian Spring 3LNO survey, in addition to the years 2020 and 2017, will trigger Exceptional Circumstances next year.

2. *The composite survey index used in the HCR, in a given year, is above or below the 90 percent probability envelopes projected by the base case operating models from SSM and SCAA under the MS;*

The composite survey index has remained within the 90% probability envelopes from the base case SCAA operating model (**Figure i.2**). Probability envelopes from the base case SSM indicate that the most recent composite survey index is within the 90% probability envelopes (**Figure i.3**). Prior values were above the 90% probability envelopes, though exceeding these values is not a conservation concern. Given the composite index remains within the 90% probability envelope from the SCAA and has been above or within the 90% probability envelope from the SSM projections, SC concludes that this does not constitute Exceptional Circumstances.

3. *TACs established that are not generated from the MP*.

The TAC established for 2021 was generated from the MP. This does not constitute Exceptional Circumstances.

The following elements will require application of expert judgment to determine whether Exceptional Circumstances are occurring:

1. the five survey indices relative to the 80, 90, and 95 percent probability envelopes projected by the base case operating models (SSM and SCAA) for each survey;

Survey indices from the past four years are primarily within the 80% probability envelopes from the base case SCAA operating model (14 out of 17 observations). In 2017, both the EU 3M and EU-Spain 3NO surveys were above the 90% but within the 95% probability envelope, and in 2020 the EU 3M survey index was just below the 95% envelope (**Figure i.2**). Likewise, survey indices were primarily within the 80% probability envelopes from the SSM projections (10 out of 17 observations); however, one observation was below the 90% but within the 95% envelope (EU 3M in 2020), two were above the 90% but within the 95% envelope (Canada Fall 3LNO in 2018 and 2020), and three were above the 95% envelopes (EU 3M 0-1400m in 2017, Canada Spring 3LNO in 2018, and EU-Spain 3NO in 2017; **Figure i.3**). Though the declining trajectory of the EU 3M survey index in isolation is a possible concern, SC does not consider this Exceptional Circumstances as most indices are within or above the probability envelopes from both models.

2. *survey data at age four (age before recruitment to the fishery) compared to its series mean to monitor the status of recruitment;*

Recruitment at age four has returned to average levels following six years of below average recruitment (**Figure i.4**). SC concludes that this does not constitute Exceptional Circumstances at this time; however, this remains a possible concern given the long preceding period of below average recruitment.

3. discrepancies between catches and the TAC calculated using the MP

The TAC for 2020 was 16 926 t. The catch in 2020 was 16 307 t (<4% difference). SC concludes that this does not constitute Exceptional Circumstances.

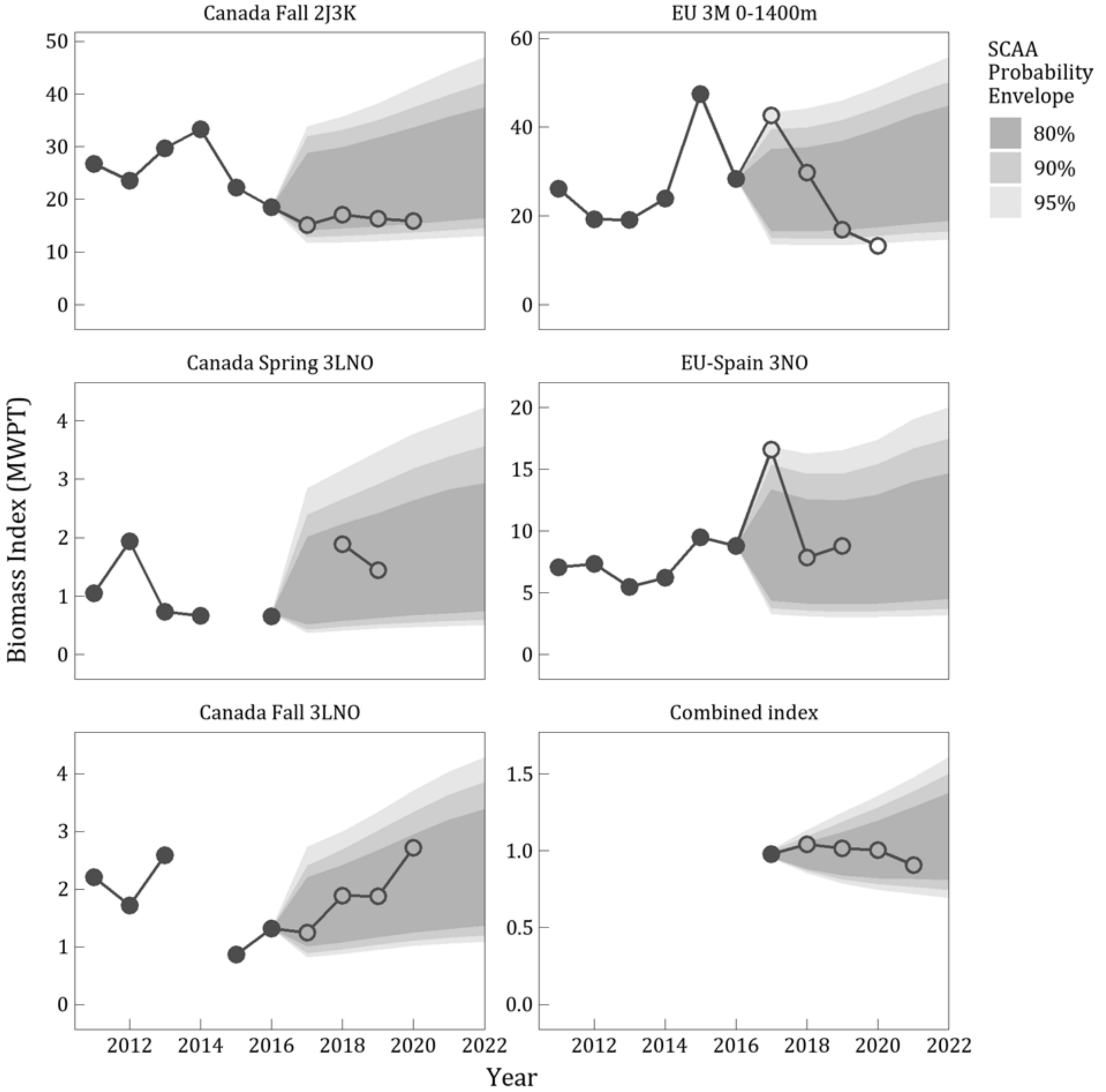


Figure. i.2. Greenland Halibut in Subarea 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO. Mean weight per tow from Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 2J3K, Canadian spring surveys in Divs. 3LNO, Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 3LNO, EU Flemish Cap surveys (to 1400m depth) in Div. 3M and EU-Spain surveys in 3NO. The figure also shows the combined index used in the target based component of the HCR. For the survey and combined indices, 80%, 90% and 95% probability envelopes from the SCAA base case simulation are shown. Index values observed from 2017 onward are shown using open circles.

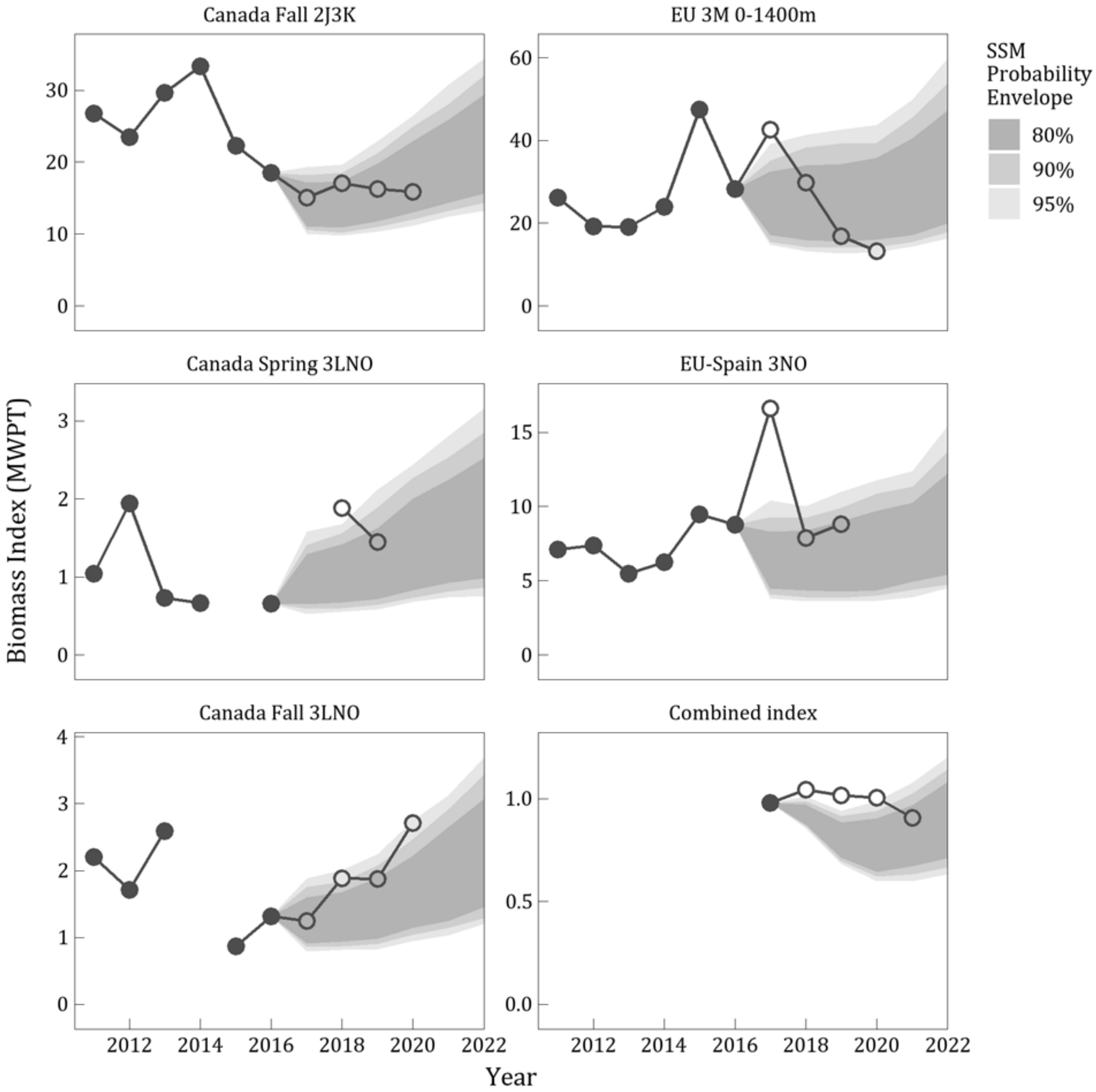


Figure. i.3. Greenland Halibut in Subarea 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO. Mean weight per tow from Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 2J3K, Canadian spring surveys in Divs. 3LNO, Canadian fall surveys in Divs. 3LNO, EU Flemish Cap surveys (to 1400m depth) in Div. 3M and EU-Spain surveys in 3NO. The figure also shows the combined index used in the target based component of the HCR. For the survey and combined indices, 80%, 90% and 95% probability envelopes from the SSM base case simulation are shown. Index values observed from 2017 onward are shown using open circles.

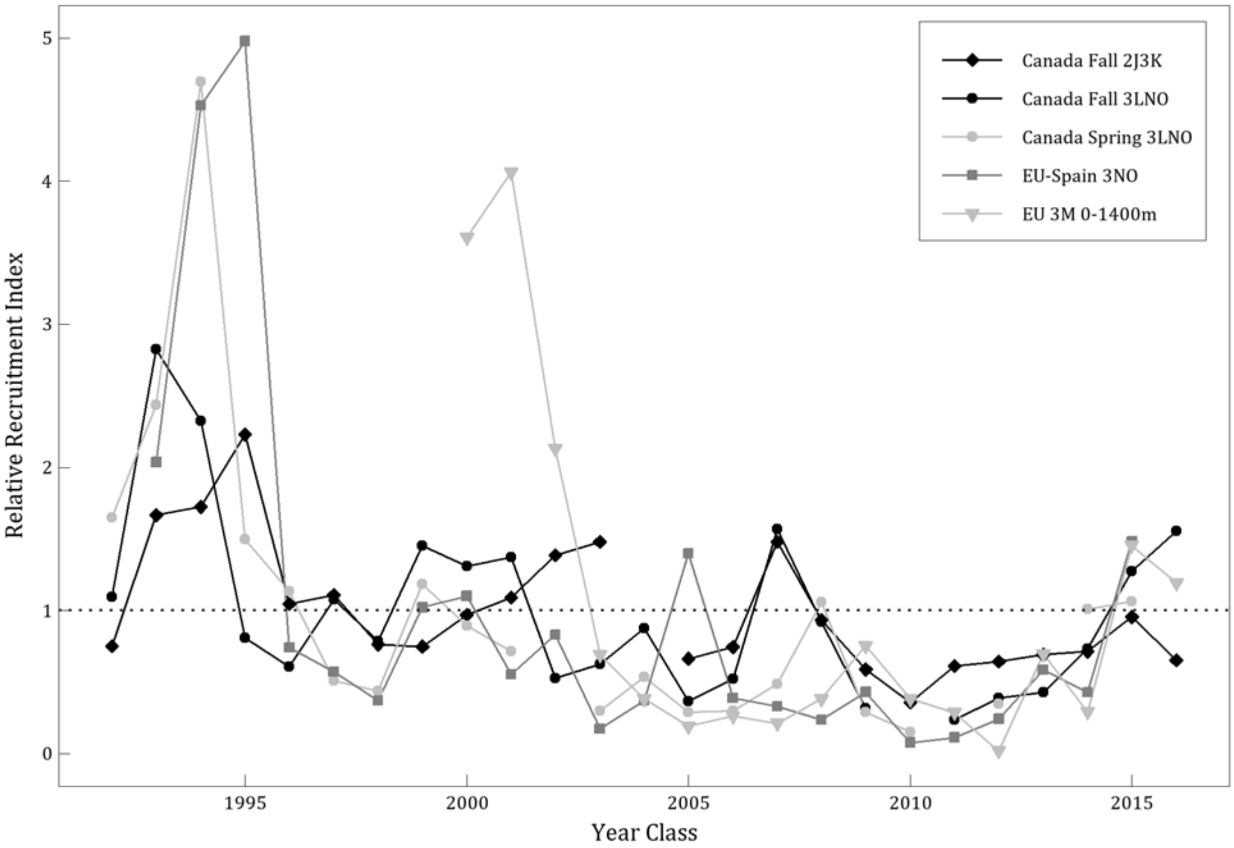


Figure. i.4. Greenland Halibut in Subarea 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO. Relative recruitment (age 4) indices from Canadian fall surveys in Div. 2J3K, Canadian spring surveys in Div. 3LNO, Canadian fall surveys in Div. 3LNO, EU-Spain survey in 3NO and EU survey of Flemish Cap. Each series is scaled to its average, which then corresponds to the horizontal dotted line at 1.

Initial evaluation of Exceptional Circumstances for 2022 due to missing survey data

The cancellation of the 2021 Canadian spring 3LNO survey, in addition to missing survey indices required for the Greenland halibut HCR for the years 2020 and 2017, will trigger Exceptional Circumstances in 2022, potentially disrupting the calculation of the TAC for 2023. Following guidance under the Exceptional Circumstances Protocol (Annex I.G of NAFO/COM Doc. 21-01), SC conducted an initial evaluation of the severity of this issue, assuming no other reason for Exceptional Circumstances arises in 2022. To conduct this evaluation, past TACs were calculated using the HCR with and without the Canadian spring 3LNO survey series; this showed that this survey had a minimal impact on the calculation of past TACs (<3% difference; **Table i.3**). Although missing survey data is a serious concern, the impact of the issue in this case is relatively small because the Canadian spring 3LNO survey has the lowest weighting in the TAC calculation from the HCR and, therefore, is the least influential series used in the resulting TAC values. Conditional on the absence of other reasons for Exceptional Circumstances arising next year, SC advises that adjusting the TAC advised for 2022 using the HCR informed by four survey indices only (Canadian fall 2J3K, Canadian fall 3LNO, EU 3M 0-1400m, and EU-Spain 3NO surveys) may serve as a reasonable option for providing TAC advice for 2023 with minimal deviation from the agreed Management Procedure.

Table i.3. Effect of excluding the Canadian spring survey of NAFO Divs. 3LNO on the calculation of the TAC using the Greenland halibut HCR. Percent differences are indicated in parentheses.

TAC Year	Baseline	Excluding Canadian Spring 3LNO
2019	16 434*	16 486 (0.3%)
2020	16 867*	16 733 (-0.8%)
2021	16 498	16 094 (-2.5%)
2022	15 864	15 456 (-2.6%)

* These TAC values are slightly different from those used because of a minor misspecification of J_{target} (SCR Doc. 20/042).

Provisional workplan for a revised Management Strategy Evaluation for Greenland halibut

Article 10 of NAFO/COM Doc. 21-01 states that "The current Management Strategy (MS) for Greenland halibut stock in Subarea 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO adopted by NAFO in 2017 shall be in force from 2018 to 2023 inclusive." Following this Rebuilding Program, a TAC for 2024 will need to be recommended using a revised MS developed before September 2023. In anticipation of this required review of the MS for Greenland halibut, SC has developed a coarse workplan outlining the time required to conduct this review:

1. *SC June, Year 1 - Proposal and review of the data to be used; consensus required at this time for Operating Model (OM) development to commence.*
2. *SC January, Year 2 (intersessional) - Proposal and review of OMs to be used; consensus required at this time for Candidate Management Procedure (CMP) testing to commence.*
3. *WG-RBMS April, Year 2 - Refinement of performance statistics including risk tolerances and constraints; identify initial CMPs.*
4. *SC June, Year 2 - Review and test CMPs; finalise the suite of CMPs to be used in the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE).*
5. *WG-RBMS August, Year 2 - Evaluate performance statistics and make a final decision on the MS to propose to the Commission.*
6. *COM September, Year 2 - The Commission considers adoption of proposed new MS for Greenland halibut.*

SC notes that this process is expected to take two years and its timing is conditional on decisions on the overall SC five-year workplan (response to Commission request #10)

When considering workplans, the issue of reference points was also raised. Reference points are not explicitly defined for this stock and this precludes the qualification of stock status under the PA framework. While such concerns are implicitly addressed within the MSE process, it is also possible to develop an MS that responds to a specified reference point (e.g., B_{lim} expressed in terms of an observable composite index). SC will seek the views of WG-RBMS on pursuing the addition of such a feature to the MS.

ii) Request #3: Continue the evaluation of scientific trawl surveys in VME closed areas and the effect on stock assessments of excluding the surveys from these areas

The Commission requests that the Scientific Council continue its evaluation of the impact of scientific trawl surveys on VME in closed areas, and the effect of excluding surveys from these areas on stock assessments.

This request was not addressed in June 2021 and is deferred to September 2021 (if possible) or June 2022 (otherwise).

iii) Request #4: Implement the steps of the bycatch and discards action plan relevant to SC

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to implement the steps of the Action plan relevant to the Scientific Council and in particular the tasks identified under section 2.2 of the Action Plan, for progression in the management and minimization of Bycatch and discards (COM Doc. 17-26).

- *Tasks outlined in Tasks 3.1 and 3.2 of the NAFO Action Plan in the Management and Minimization of Bycatch and Discards (COM Doc. 17-26).*

SC already provided a response to Section 2.2 of the Action Plan ("Identification of species under NAFO catch or effort limits with high survivability rates") in the September 2020 SC report. Responses to Tasks 3.1 and 3.2 are presented here.

Task. 3.1. Moratoria species. Identify moratoria stocks where the level of bycatch/discards may be impeding recovery.

Scientific Council responded:

Evidence suggests that current stock dynamics in most moratoria stocks are being driven primarily by natural causes (high natural mortality, low ecosystem productivity). Under these conditions, SC noted that even the low levels of bycatch observed in recent years may be contributing to the lack of recovery of these stocks, particularly for American plaice in Div. 3LNO and cod in 3NO.

The fish communities in the Newfoundland and Labrador (which includes the Grand Bank Ecosystem Production Unit), and Flemish Cap bioregions have experienced major structural changes over the last 40 years. Synergies between historical overfishing and/or extreme environmental conditions, have resulted in a regime shift and collapse of the fish community in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as significant changes in the Flemish Cap fish community.

While total fish biomass has remained generally stable over time in the Flemish Cap, the situation is different in the NL ecosystems, where total fish biomass remains well below pre-collapse levels, and ecosystem conditions remain indicative of reduced productivity. Considering these changes in ecosystem structure and productivity is key to evaluate the factors that may impede recovery of specific stocks because they can drive and/or influence natural mortality, growth, reproductive potential, and/or recruitment.

In this context of changing ecosystem conditions, stock recovery depends on environmental factors as well as fishing impact. For stocks under moratoria, bycatch in fisheries directed for other species, whether retained or discarded, constitute such fishing impact. Under any given set of environmental conditions, bycatch will impede recovery, the extent depending on the mortality it induces, and how it relates to natural mortality.

In this analysis of bycatch impact on stocks under moratoria, CESAG total catch estimates were used, in conjunction with fishing mortality and stock biomass estimates from the assessments done by SC (Table iii.1).

Shrimp in Div. 3LNO, Capelin in Div. 3NO, and Alfonsino in Div. 6G all have a very low or almost zero level of catches, and also low fishing mortality (F), in the years in which they have been in moratorium (Table iii.1). Without further analyses, the impact of these levels of catches on these stocks recovery may be seen as negligible.

For the other stocks of the Table iii.1, the situation is the following:

American plaice in Divs. 3LNO (SCR Doc. 21/20): The stock has been under moratorium since 1995. Biomass and abundance have been relatively stable at a low level, well below B_{lim}, since around 2000. Significant retrospective patterns in the ADAPT VPA put into question the estimates of the absolute levels of fishing mortality (F). However, all sources of information considered by SC point towards a recent relative increase in both natural mortality (M) and F, although separating the impacts of M and F in this stock remains difficult. While recruitment continues to be poor, current levels of bycatch may also be contributing to a lack of recovery in this stock.

Northern cod in Divs. 2J3KL (DFO 2019a, DFO 2021): This stock has been under moratorium since 1992. The stock was at very low levels until it began to increase in 2007. The stock is now at 52% of B_{lim} but has plateaued since 2017. Fishing mortality on ages 5-14 is low, at 0.02, and has been for more than a decade. Levels of natural mortality are thought to be delaying the recovery of this stock.

Witch flounder in Divs. 2J3KL (DFO 2019b): This stock has been under moratorium in Canadian waters since 1995, and in the NAFO regulatory area since 1998. The stock remains below B_{lim}; however biomass indices have been steadily increasing since the early 2000s. Bycatch remains low, averaging 106 t annually from 2015-2019. Current levels of fishing mortality do not appear to be limiting recovery of this stock.

Atlantic cod in Divs. 3NO (SCR Doc. 21/031): This stock has been under moratorium since 1994. Overall, the Grand Bank Ecosystem Production Unit is experiencing low productivity conditions and, despite fishing mortality estimates for 3NO cod being very low for well over a decade, the stock has shown no sign of sustained recovery and remains well below B_{lim} (SSB estimated at 12% of B_{lim} in 2020). It is likely that stock dynamics are currently being driven primarily by natural causes (high natural mortality, low ecosystem productivity). However, under these conditions even the low levels of by catch observed in recent years may be contributing to the lack of recovery for this stock.

American plaice in Div. 3M: The most recent assessment of this stock can be found in NAFO (2020). The stock has been under moratorium since 1996. Stock biomass and SSB recorded a minimum in 2007, due to consistent year-to-year recruitment failure from the 1991 to 2005 year-classes. Since 2006 the recruitment improved, particularly the 2006, 2012, 2013 and 2015 year-classes. Stock biomass and SSB increased from 2007 to 2012 and have remained stable at a relatively low level. From 2016 to 2019 both biomasses recovered, to the levels of mid 90´s, when the fishery was closed. Both catches and F remain low, although slightly higher catches are observed since 2013. American plaice Div. 3M bycatch may be delaying the recovery but the main factor is inconsistency of the recruitment.

References

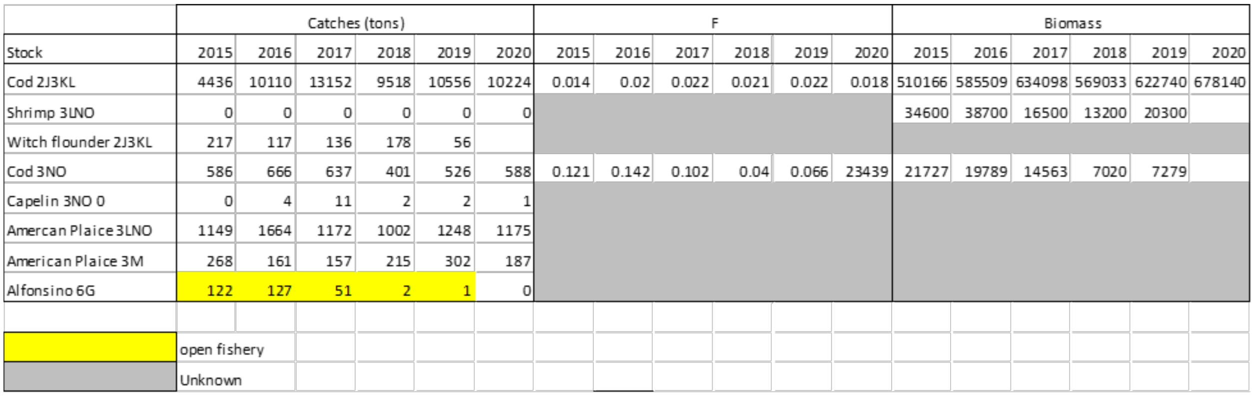
DFO. 2019a. Stock assessment of Northern cod (NAFO Divisions 2J3KL) in 2019. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Sci. Advis. Rep. 2019/050.

DFO. 2019b. Stock Assessment of Witch Flounder (Glyptocephalus cynoglossus) in NAFO Divisions 2J3KL. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Sci. Advis. Rep. 2018/053

DFO. 2021. 2020 Stock Status Update for Northern Cod. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Sci. Resp. 2021/004.

NAFO, 2020. “Report of the June Scientific Council Meeting, 28 May - 12 June 2020”. NAFO SCS Doc. 20/14, Serial nº N7099, 261pp.

Table iii.1. NAFO Stocks in moratoria: catches, fishing mortality (F) and biomass based on the SC most recent assessments.



	Catches (tons)						F						Biomass					
Stock	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cod 2J3KL	4436	10110	13152	9518	10556	10224	0.014	0.02	0.022	0.021	0.022	0.018	510166	585509	634098	569033	622740	678140
Shrimp 3LNO	0	0	0	0	0	0							34600	38700	16500	13200	20300	
Witch flounder 2J3KL	217	117	136	178	56													
Cod 3NO	586	666	637	401	526	588	0.121	0.142	0.102	0.04	0.066	23439	21727	19789	14563	7020	7279	
Capelin 3NO 0	0	4	11	2	2	1												
Amercan Plaice 3LNO	1149	1664	1172	1002	1248	1175												
American Plaice 3M	268	161	157	215	302	187												
Alfonsino 6G	122	127	51	2	1	0												

🟨 open fishery

▒ Unknown

Task 3.2. Areas where there is a risk of causing serious harm to bycatch species: Identify areas, times and fisheries where bycatch and discards, notably of moratoria species, that have a higher rate of occurrence.

Scientific Council responded:

In the NRA, the moratoria stocks with the highest levels of bycatch are American plaice 3LNO, cod 3NO and American plaice 3M. The highest frequencies of hauls with bycatch occur in the fisheries that are being carried out at less than 200 meters: yellowtail flounder 3LNO, thorny skate 3LNO and cod 3M. Differences in the distribution of bycatch were observed among quarters. However, there were no differences in the distribution of sets with and without bycatch within fisheries within quarters.

As recommended in the NAFO Action Plan, the best information to analyze spatio-temporal patterns of catches and bycatch is the haul by haul (HbH) data. In NAFO, the HbH data is compiled by the NAFO Secretariat and is only available for the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA). Therefore, the analyses presented for stocks in Divisions 3LNO based on the HbH data are not complete and the results are partial.

Two different analyses of bycatch of moratorium species, both based on the HbH data, have been carried out and reviewed by the SC. One is based on the bycatch composition of the moratoria species in the different fisheries; so, the starting point is the fishery and the catch composition of the fishery is examined, paying particular attention to the bycatch of moratoria stocks. The other analysis is based on the contribution of the different fisheries to the bycatch of the moratoria stocks; so, the starting point is the bycatch of the moratoria stock and the contribution of different fisheries to this bycatch is examined. These two analyses are, therefore, complementary of each other.

The first of the analyses examined eleven interactions (Table iii.2) between fishery stocks (i.e. stocks to which a fishery is directed) and moratoria stocks taken in the fishery as bycatch. The objective of this temporal and spatial analysis was to identify "hotspots" of bycatch occurrence in fisheries. In general, the results show that there is no obvious spatial or interannual variability within each fishery, i.e., their respective behaviors have not changed. Cod and American plaice are the major bycatch species of the ground fish fisheries in the NRA, corresponding to the following moratoria stocks: Div. 2J3KL cod, Div. 3NO cod, Div. 3M American plaice and Div. 3LNO American plaice.

Table iii.2. Interactions between the directed fishery species/stock and the main bycatch moratoria stocks (analyzed by the NAFO Secretariat, NAFO/COM Doc. 20-04).

Directed Fishery	**By catch moratoria species/stocks**
Cod Div. 3M	American plaice Div. 3M
Redfish Div. 3M	American plaice Div. 3M
Redfish Div. 3LN	Cod Div. 2J3KL Cod Div. 3NO American Plaice Div. 3LNO
Redfish Div. 3O	Cod Div. 3NO American Plaice Div. 3LNO
Yellowtail flounder Div. 3LNO	Cod Div. 3NO American Plaice Div. 3LNO
Skates Div. 3LNO	Cod Div. 3NO American Plaice Div. 3LNO

The results by fishery show that:

- No interannual spatial and temporal variation was observed in the 11 fisheries-bycatch interactions.
- Cod and American plaice are the major bycatch species of the groundfish fisheries in the NRA. They comprise the moratorium stocks of cod in Div. 2J3KL, cod in Div. 3NO, American plaice in Div. 3M and American plaice in Div. 3LNO.
- Redfish fisheries hotspots in the Nose and Tail of the Grand Bank (Divisions 3LN and 3O) are located near the slopes of the Bank.
- Similar Directed stock - Bycatch stock interactions were observed in the yellowtail flounder and skate fisheries in Divisions 3LNO despite the different minimum mesh size requirements for the fisheries, i.e. 130 mm and 280 mm, respectively.
- In redfish in Div. 3LN fishery, two stocks of cod were observed to be bycatch, namely the cod in Div. 3NO and cod in Div. 2J3KL stocks.

A monthly analysis of the yellowtail flounder Div. 3LNO fishery and the skate Div. 3LNO fishery illustrate that:

- In the yellowtail fishery, American plaice bycatch, in terms of weight and percentage relative to the weight in the fishery, is generally bigger than cod bycatch.
- In the yellowtail flounder fishery, American plaice bycatch is prevalent in non-winter months.
- In the skates fishery, no monthly trend can be discerned regarding the American plaice or the cod bycatch.
- American plaice bycatch occurs in both yellowtail flounder and skates fisheries.

The second study presented to the SC (SCR Doc 21/024) focuses on the different stocks under moratoria and examines, for each of them, which are the main fisheries that contribute to the catch (actually, bycatch) of the stock. For some of the moratoria stocks, the level of catch is low and/or the NRA only represents a very small proportion of their distribution area. For this reason, the seasonal/spatial catch analysis based on the HbH data in this study was restricted to the following moratoria stocks: Div. 3M American plaice, Div. 3LNO American plaice and Div. 3NO cod. The conclusions on the last two stocks are partial since the data analyzed only cover part of their distribution (the NRA). The general conclusions of this second analysis (based on stocks) are consistent with those of the previous one (based on fisheries) and indicate there are no remarkable spatial differences between the hauls with and without bycatch of the moratoria stocks of the different directed fisheries. It can be observed that the directed fisheries that have a higher frequency of bycatch of these species / stocks in moratorium are those that are carried out at less than 200 meters of depth: yellowtail flounder Div.

3LNO, skates Div. 3LNO and cod Div. 3M in the shallowest part of the Flemish Cap (Table iii.3). In some fisheries, it is possible to observe variations in the frequencies of sets with moratoria species bycatch by quarter; this is the case for cod Div. 3M fishery-American plaice Div. 3M bycatch, yellowtail flounder Div. 3LNO fishery-American plaice Div. 3LNO bycatch, skates Div. 3LNO fishery-American plaice Div. 3LNO bycatch. In some cases this temporal pattern is related to the displacement of the directed fishery to different areas, as is the case of the cod fishery in Div. 3M, which in the second semester moves to shallower areas of Flemish Cap, increasing the bycatch frequency of America plaice.

The more detailed space-time results found in this second study for the analyzed moratoria stocks were as follows:

American plaice Div. 3M stock: the main fisheries that catch American plaice in Div. 3M as bycatch are the cod trawl fishery and the redfish trawl fishery, which represent 54% and 44% of the HbH stock total catches, respectively. In Div. 3M, 53% of the sets targeting cod and 38% of the sets targeting redfish caught America plaice as bycatch. The frequency with which American plaice bycatch occurs in the sets targeting cod presents a clear increasing trend throughout the year, while it remains much more constant for the sets targeting redfish.

American plaice Div. 3LNO stock: The main fisheries catching American plaice as bycatch in the NRA Div. 3LNO are the yellowtail flounder fishery, with 43% of the total HbH American plaice catches in the NRA Div. 3LNO, the redfish fishery (36%) and the skate fishery (15%). In the NRA Division 3LNO, 75% of sets targeting yellowtail flounder, 57% of sets targeting redfish and 87% of sets targeting skates caught America plaice as bycatch. The frequency with which American plaice bycatch appears in the sets targeting yellowtail flounder and skates presents a growing trend throughout the year, whereas in the redfish fishery the frequency is quite stable in all quarters, except for the third quarter, in which the frequency is much lower. Yellowtail flounder and skates fisheries in the NRA Div. 3LNO are mainly conducted at depths shallower than 200 meters, and it seems that at these depths American plaice is caught much more frequently than at the greater depths where the redfish fishery is carried out.

Cod 3NO stock: The main fisheries that have cod as bycatch in the NRA Div. 3NO are the redfish trawl fishery, with 54% of the HbH NRA Div. 3NO cod total catches, the skate fishery (22%) and the yellowtail flounder fishery (16%). Although the percentage of total catch of cod as bycatch is higher in the redfish fishery, the highest frequency of sets where cod appears as bycatch is in the skate fishery (73% of the sets), followed by the redfish fishery (62% of the sets) and yellowtail flounder fishery (43% of the sets). There is no clear pattern to these frequencies throughout the year. The yellowtail flounder fishery and the skate fishery in the NRA Division 3NO are mainly conducted in similar areas, in depths shallower than 200 meters. It should be noted that although the fisheries are carried out in similar areas, the frequency with which cod appears as bycatch is higher in the fishery directed to skates than in the fishery directed to yellowtail flounder.

Table iii.3. Bycatch of moratoria stocks in Divs. 3LMNO in different fisheries (SCR Doc 21/024). For Divs. 3LNO, only the NRA part could be analyzed.

Moratoria stock	Main fisheries with bycatch of moratoria stock	% of the moratoria stock bycatch in different fisheries	% of hauls in fisheries with occurrence of the moratoria stock
American plaice Div. 3M	Cod in 3M; Redfish in 3M	Cod in 3M (54%); Redfish in 3M (44%)	Cod in 3M (53%); Redfish in 3M (38%)
American plaice Div. 3LNO	Yellowtail flounder in 3LNO; Redfish fisheries in 3LN and 3O; Skates in 3LNO	Yellowtail flounder (43%); Redfish fisheries (36%); Skates (15%)	Yellowtail flounder (75%); Redfish fisheries (57%); Skates (87%)
Cod Div. 3NO	Redfish fisheries in 3LN and 3O; Skates in 3LNO; Yellowtail flounder in 3LNO	Redfish fisheries (54%); Skates (22%); Yellowtail flounder (16%)	Redfish fisheries (62%); Skates (73%); Yellowtail flounder (43%)

iv) Request #5: Continue to refine work on the Ecosystem Roadmap

The Commission requests that Scientific Council continue to refine work on the Ecosystem Road Map:

- *Continue to test the reliability of the ecosystem production potential model and other related models*
- *Report on these results to WG-EAFFM and WG-RBMS to further develop how it may apply to management decisions*
- *Develop options of how ecosystem advice could inform management decisions, an issue which is directly linked to the results of the foreseen EAFM roadmap workshop.*
- *Continue its work to develop models that support implementation of Tier 2 of the EAFM Roadmap.*

Scientific Council responded:

While there has been no further scientific development of Tier 1-related work (e.g. Fisheries Production Potential models, TCI) the SC reiterates the advice provided on this topic in 2020 (SCS Doc 20/14):

"SC **recommends** *that, as an interim measure in the implementation of the NAFO Roadmap, the particular circumstances in the state of stocks and the potential consequences to fishery sustainability be considered and addressed in management decisions when the combined TACs can result in overall catches about two-fold greater than the TCI guidance. Total catches above TCIs would require more frequent ecosystem monitoring/reporting*.

SC also **recommends** *the development of simulation-based analyses (Management Strategy Evaluation, or analogous processes), to evaluate the reliability of specific decision rules for species-aggregated catch levels based on the TCI, though recognizing that this will be a complex exercise requiring considerable time, resources and stakeholder involvement, and hence the need for interim measures as indicated above.*

Furthermore, SC **recommends** *that priority be given for the development of multispecies dynamic models to a) complement the recommended simulation-based exercises and investigate the consequences of time-dependent dynamics on the operational reliability of the TCIs as guidance for ecosystem-level advice, and b) contribute to the development of tools toward implementation of the Tier-2 level of the Roadmap*."

The NAFO Roadmap toward an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries is organized around two general components dealing with a) sustainability of the fisheries exploitation (i.e., impacts on fished stocks), from an ecosystem (Tier 1), multispecies (Tier 2) and single species (Tier 3) perspective, and b) the effects of fishing on other ecosystem elements (i.e., impacts of fishing on habitats). The effects of fishing on other ecosystem elements is being addressed through the SAI-VME work, and other NAFO processes (e.g. COM WG-BDS). The work on the sustainability of fisheries exploitation has been focused, among other things, on making Tier 1 operational through the use of the Total Catch Index (TCI) to be considered and addressed in management decisions.

The 2020 advice provides for an interim implementation of Tier 1 while a more fulsome discussion on the Roadmap implementation can take place. SC has continued its collaboration with managers in the context of COM-SC WG-EAFFM to further the implementation of the Roadmap. The Covid-19 pandemic prevented a workshop planned to inform this process from taking place. Despite the delays, SC remains fully committed to the process, and is contributing (via COM-SC WG-EAFFM) to the organization of an internal NAFO dialogue session on the Roadmap in late 2021 to further clarify concepts and ideas in preparation for the full EAFM Roadmap Workshop currently scheduled as a face-to-face meeting in 2022.

v) Request #6: Re-assessment of NAFO bottom fisheries in 2021

The Commission requests that Scientific Council, in preparation for the re-assessment of NAFO bottom fisheries in 2021 and discussion on VME fishery closures:

- *Assess the overlap of NAFO fisheries with VME to evaluate fishery specific impacts in addition to the cumulative impacts for NRA fisheries;*
- *Consider clearer objective ranking processes and options for weighting criteria for the overall assessment of significant adverse impacts and the risk of future adverse impacts;*
- *Maintain efforts to assess all six FAO criteria including the three FAO functional SAI criteria which could not be evaluated in the current assessment.*
- *Provide input and analysis of potential management options, with the goal of supporting meaningful and effective discussions between scientists and managers at the 2021 WG-EAFFM meeting.*
- *Continue to work on the VME indicator species as listed in Annex IE, Section VI to prepare for the next assessment.*

The SC response to this request is structured into three main parts:

Part (i) presents the assessment of the risk of Significant Adverse Impacts (SAIs) from bottom fishing activities on VMEs in the NRA, conducted by SC in the last year.

Part (ii) presents potential management options in relation to the latest review of VME closures.

Part (iii) reviews the adequacy of seamount closure boundaries and results in recommendations for some changes to them.

Details are provided below.

Part (i) Assessment of the risk of SAI from bottom fishing activities on VMEs in the NRA.

Scientific council responded:

SC completed the assessment of the risk of Significant Adverse Impacts (SAIs) from bottom fishing activities on VMEs in the NRA. The assessment was based on estimates of the biomass distribution of VMEs, the distribution of fishing effort (VMS data), and a set of assessment metrics that considers ecosystem function and fragmentation. Structurally, the assessment is similar to that conducted in 2016 but with greater spatial resolution of updated survey trawl biomass and commercial fishing effort. The greater spatial resolution applied in the present assessment (from 5km to 1km) results in more precise and generally larger estimates of the area and biomass protected by the current VME closures, relative to the 2020 review of VME closures.

Results indicated that small gorgonian, black coral, erect bryozoan and sea squirt VMEs have a high overall risk of SAI[1], whereas the large-sized sponges and large gorgonian coral VMEs have a low overall risk of SAI. The sea pen VME was assessed as having an intermediate risk of SAI.

	Large-sized Sponges		Sea pens		Large gorgonians		Small gorgonians		Black coral		Erect bryozoans		Sea Squirts	
SAI metric	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**
VME Protected	64%	93%	16%	33%	60%	89%	2%	2%	17%	23%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
VME At Risk	19%	6%	74%	65%	23%	10%	72%	86%	63%	67%	96%	99%	79%	85%
VME Impacted	18%	1%	9%	2%	16%	1%	26%	12%	20%	10%	4%	1%	21%	14%
SAI Risk (biomass)	**Low**		**Intermediate**		**Low**		**High**		**High**		**High**		**High**	
VME Fragmentation/Proximity	1112		394		255		125		109		717		802	
Fishing effort stability (over 10 yrs.)	82%		39%		44%		80%		54%		0%		39%	
VME Sensitivity	3.3		0.2		1.7		0.5		1.4		0.1		0.5	
Proportion of VME area/biomass overlapping in closures (km² and kg)	62%	99%	19%	42%	65%	82%	9%	9%	21%	23%	4%	3%	0%	0%
Number of important functions in unprotected portions of the VME.	2		4		2		1		3		4		4	
Overall SAI Risk[2]	**Low (1, 6)**		**Intermediate (3, 1)**		**Low (2, 4)**		**High (5, 2)**		**High (6, 0)**		**High (6, 1)**		**High (5, 1)**	
Ranking for Management Action	**7**		**5**		**6**		**4**		**1**		**2**		**3**	

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[1] Significant Adverse Impact is a term defined by FAO (2009). It does not imply statistical significance, but rather to identify and quantify impacts which are important.

[2] The overall SAI Risk score was calculated by simply counting the number of high-risk category scores (in red) and the low-risk category scores (in green) for both the area and biomass metrics. These numbers are respectively shown in parenthesis. A combination of the high and low SAI risk scores provides the basis for ranking the management priority from high to low.

The 2021 reassessment of bottom fisheries including the assessment of SAI was completed by SC based on results generated through SC WG-ESA work (NAFO SCS 20/23). To avoid repetition, references to the 2020 WG-ESA Report are used in this advice. The SAI methodology followed the same general approach as presented by SC in 2016 (NAFO SCS Doc. 16/14), but with improved spatial modelling of survey trawl biomass and commercial fishing effort at higher spatial resolution, and the addition of an evaluation of the ecological functions associated with VMEs and VME fragmentation.

The requirement for the assessment followed the specification described in the NAFO Conservation and Enforcement Measures (NCEM; NAFO/FC Doc 13/1), according to the following set of tasks:

Task No.	**NCEM Fisheries Reassessment Task**	**WG-ESA Report (SCS Doc. 20/23)**
1	Type(s) of fishing conducted or contemplated, including vessels and gear types, fishing areas, target and potential bycatch species, fishing effort levels and duration of fishing (harvest plan).	Section 7.c (fisheries - page 61)
2.	Existing baseline information on the ecosystems, habitats and communities in the fishing area, against which future changes can be compared.	Section 7.a, (introduction – page 11); Section 7.b, (VMEs – page 26); Section 7.c (fisheries – page 61).
3.	Identification, description and mapping of VMEs known or likely to occur in the fishing area.	Section 7.b (VMEs – page 26)
4.	Identification, description and evaluation of occurrence, scale and duration of likely impacts, including the cumulative impacts of activities covered by the assessment of VMEs.	Section 7.d (SAI – page 100) Section 7.c (fisheries – page 61)
5.	Consideration of the VME elements known to occur in the fishing area.	See SCS 15/19 (WG-ESA report 2015)
6.	Data and methods used to identify, describe and assess the impacts of the activity, the identification of the gaps in knowledge and an evaluation of uncertainties in the information presented in the assessment.	Section 7.d (SAI – page 100) Section 7.c (fisheries – page 61)
7.	Risk assessment of likely impacts by fishing operations to determine which impacts on VMEs are likely to be significant adverse impacts.	Section 7.d (SAI – page 100)
8.	The proposed mitigation and management measures to be used to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs, and the measure to be sued to monitor effects of the fishing operations.	Section 7.e (VME management options – page 192)

The assessment of Significant Adverse Impacts (SAI)

The assessment of SAI from bottom fishing activities on VMEs in the NRA was conducted on 7 VME types (large and small gorgonians, large sponges, black corals, sea pens, bryozoans and sea squirts). The analyses were based on the recent 2020 review of existing closures (NAFO SCS Doc. 20/14). The same general methodological approach that was applied in 2016 (NAFO SCS Doc. 16/14) was used, but with improved analyses and datasets, including higher spatial precision data for VME, survey biomass and commercial fishing.

The greater spatial resolution applied in the present assessment (from 5km to 1km) results in more precise and generally larger estimates of the area and biomass protected by the current VME closures, relative to the estimates from the 2020 review of VME closures. This is because the biomass associated with 5km^2 cells whose area mostly intersects with areas outside of the VME protected polygon boundaries were not considered as protected and therefore excluded from the biomass calculations performed as part of the review of VMEs. In the present SAI analysis, the higher spatial resolution allows more of the biomass data (some of which constitute very high values) to be accurately associated with the VME protected areas. However, the differences in the overall VME biomass values in each of the assessment categories (protected, impacted and at risk) between the spatial grids does not alter the overall earlier conclusions of either the review of the VME closures or the assessment of SAI.

Fishing effort was calculated as kilometres (*km*) of trawl track travelled by a fishing vessel per *km²*, per year (NAFO SCS doc. 19/25), which provides a more accurate estimate of fishing effort. The resulting refined area of high fishing effort and corresponding potential impact is reduced compared to the analysis conducted in 2015 (NAFO SCS Doc. 15/19), as can be seen in Figure v.1.

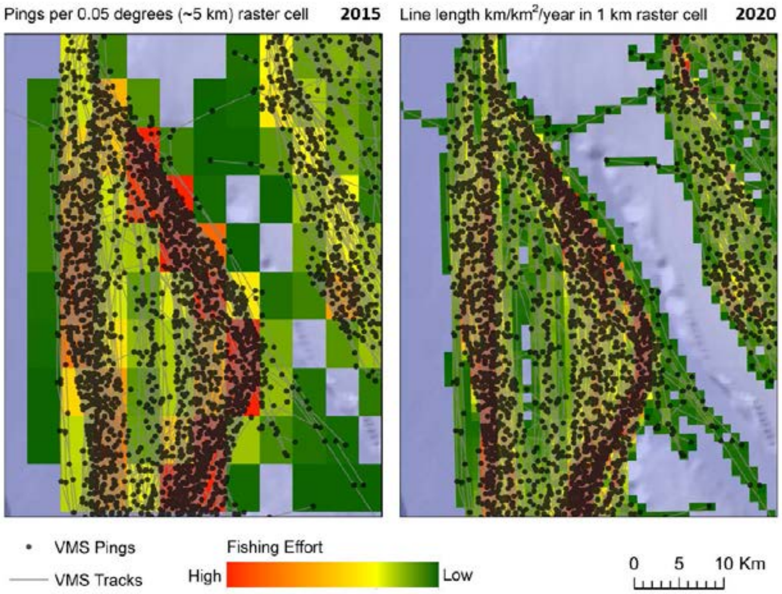

Figure v.1. Comparison of spatial resolution of fishing effort layers derived from VMS pings and trawl tracks showing the grid resolution of 5 km used in the first assessment (left panel) and the higher grid resolution of 1 km applied in the present assessment (right panel).

The final and updated map of the distribution of fishing effort as calculated from the high-resolution VMS tracks for the trawl fisheries is shown in Figure v.2.

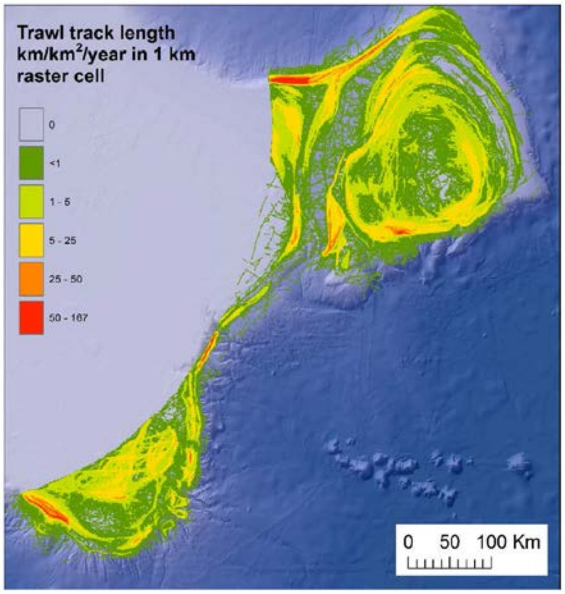

Figure v.2. Distribution of effort from trawl fisheries in the NRA between 2010 - 2019 at the 1 km resolution as used in the present assessment of SAI, based on VMS data.

To achieve better spatial correspondence between the scientific survey VME species biomass data and the commercial fishing effort, the current analysis applied a defined buffer area around each scientific trawl (500 m in all directions around the survey trawl line) and intersected the trawl survey buffer polygon with the mean annual fishing effort calculated by summing the line length of VMS tracks from 2010 - 2019 falling within each survey trawl buffer area and dividing the total length of the VMS track lines (*km*) by the area of the buffer (km^2). Finally, the total length by area was divided by the effort 10 years of the track dataset to derive the cumulative metric $km/km^2/year$ for each survey trawl biomass record. The new methodology gives a more accurate estimate of the fishing effort associated with each sample biomass from scientific trawl surveys and allows for a more accurate estimation of the fishing impact. The level of fishing effort at which high VME biomass no longer occurs in any scientific trawl was considered to indicate a sustained impacted state. The cut-off value for the level of fishing effort corresponding to an 'impacted' *vs* 'at risk' state was determined by plotting cumulative biomass curves for each VME type. The point at which 95% of the biomass is accumulated was taken as the point distinguishing between an 'impacted' *vs* 'at risk' state. A separate analysis was conducted for each VME type (Table v.1) to determine the cut-off values used to produce maps of each VME area impacted, at risk and protected (Figures v.3 to v.9).

Table v.1. Cut-off values for fishing effort signifying an impacted state based on the VME cumulative biomass curves against ranked fishing effort (km/ km^2/year). The cut-off value equals the fishing effort at which 95% of the total biomass has been accumulated. Values are also shown converted into h/km^2/year using an estimated average fishing speed of 4 knots for comparison with values resulting from the previous analysis in 2015.

	2020		**2015**
	km/km^2/year	**h/km^2/year**	**h/km^2/year**
Black corals	0.7	0.1	
Sea squirts	2.0	0.3	-
Erect bryozoans	6.8	0.9	-
Large gorgonians	0.6	0.1	0.1
Sea pens	4.3	0.6	0.5
Small gorgonians	2.2	0.3	-
Large-sized sponges	0.3	0.04	0.3

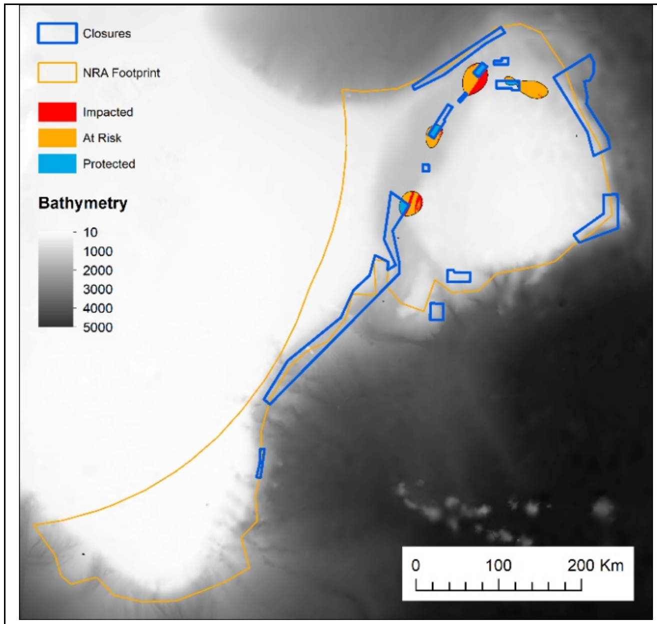

Figure v.3. <u>Black coral</u> VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

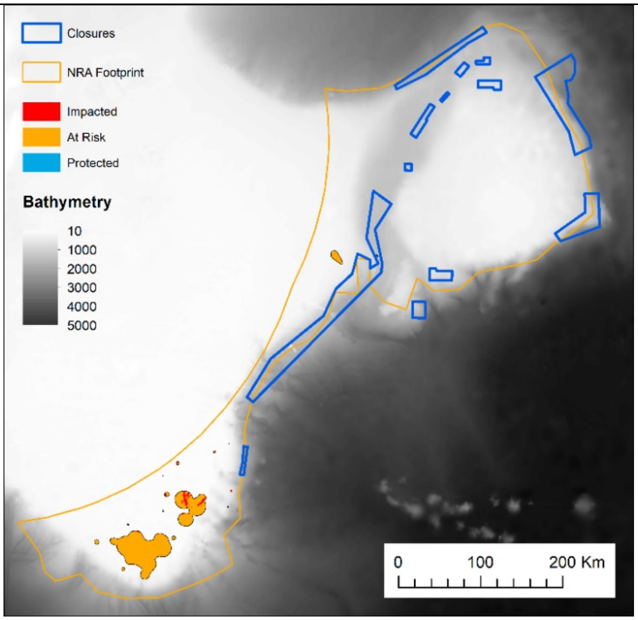

Figure v.4. <u>Erect bryozoans</u> VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

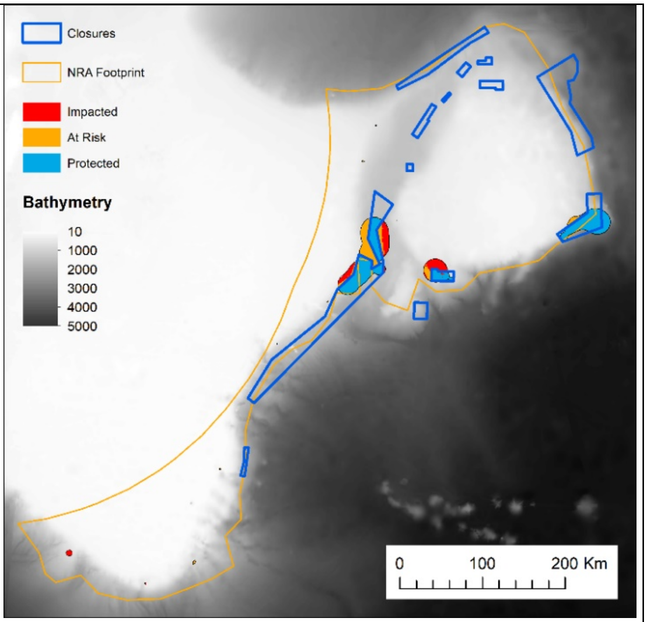

Figure v.5. <u>Large gorgonian</u> VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

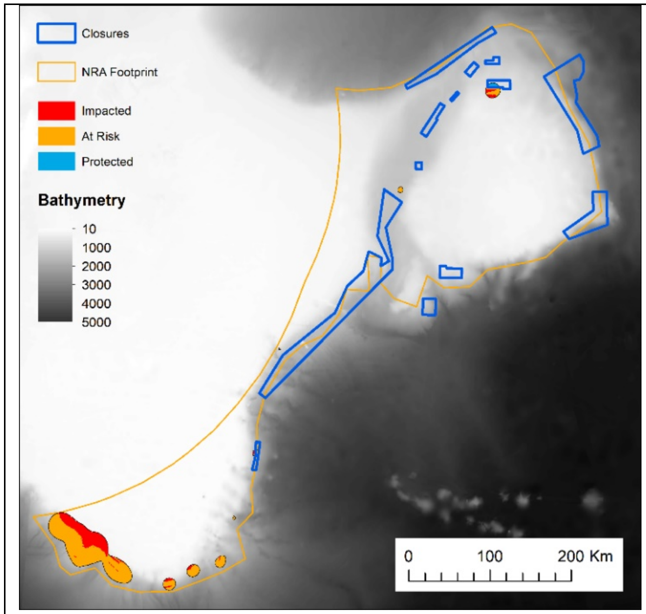

Figure v.6. Small gorgonian VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

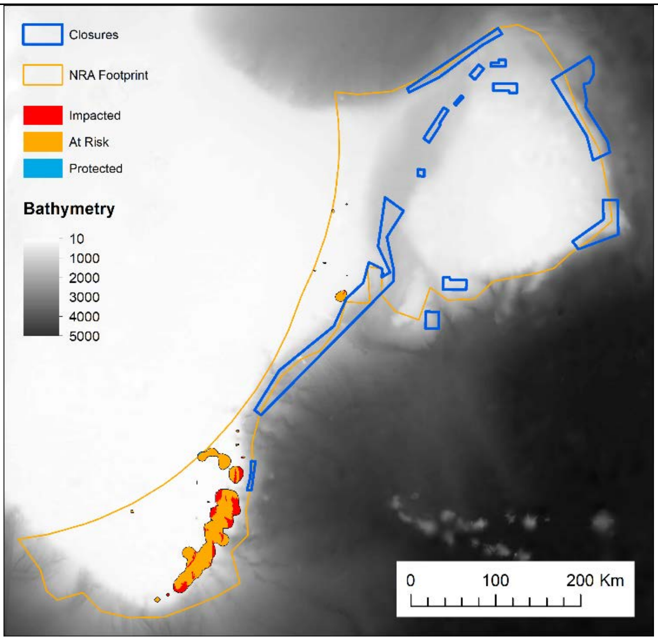

Figure v.7. Sea squirt VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

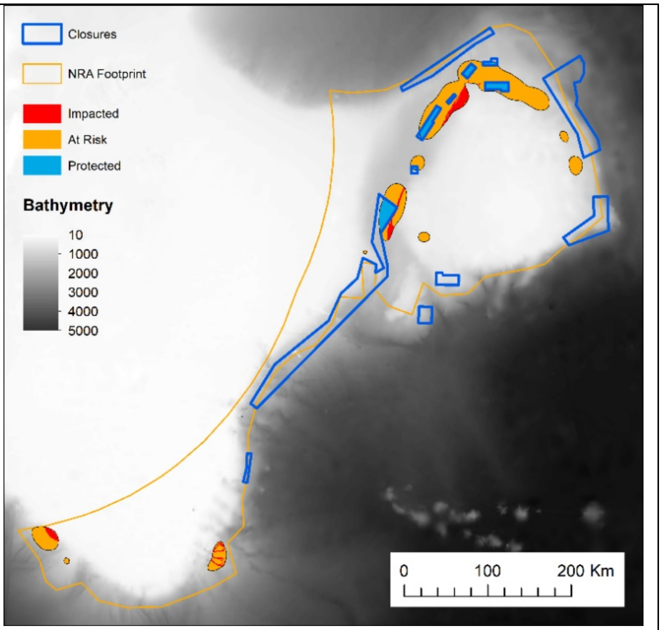

Figure v.8. Sea pen VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

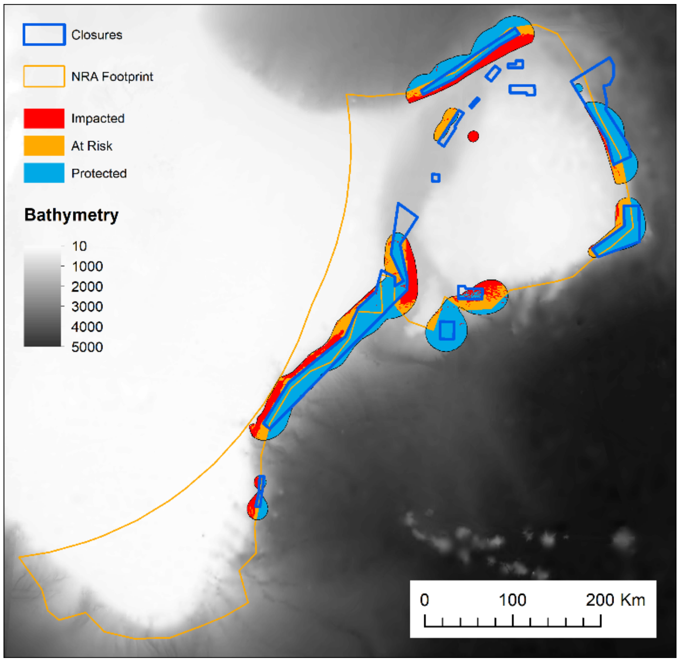

Figure v.9. Large-sized sponge VME classified impacted, at risk and protected, with the boundaries of the NRA fishing footprint and fisheries closures.

To conduct an overall assessment of SAI, a full set of assessment metrics was developed and compiled as described in Table v.2.

Table v.2. Assessment metrics applied in the 2nd reassessment of bottom fisheries SAI. The references to sections correspond to the 2020 WG-ESA Report (NAFO SCS 20/23).

SAI Assessment Metrics	Definition
Area/Biomass protected (low risk)	This refers to the proportion of the area or biomass of VME which is currently at low risk either because it falls within a fishery closure area and/or is in an area outside of the fishing footprint. (see Section 7.d.iii).
Area/Biomass impacted	Proportion of the area or biomass of VME which has been exposed to a level of fishing effort above the defined cut-off point within any one year. (See Section 7.d.iii).
Area/Biomass at high risk	Proportion of the area or biomass of VME which falls below the defined cut-off point of fishing effort within any one year which is not protected. (See Section 7.d.iii).
Proportion of overlapping VME in closures	Proportion of VME area and biomass overlapping with two or more VME types inside VME closures. The greater the proportion of overlapping VME area/biomass protected by closures the lower the risk of SAI occurring (See Section 7.d.x).
Index of VME sensitivity	The inverse of the VME impact cut-off value is used as a proxy of sensitivity as it indicates the point at which trawl duration/length exceeds the VME indicator patch size within the habitat. The higher the sensitivity the greater the risk of SAI occurring (See Section 7.d.v).

Index of fishing stability	The proportion of the total fishing effort for each VME associated with cells repeatedly fished above the impact cut-off value over a 10 period. The greater the proportion of effort associated with areas fished repeatedly above the cut-off value in 10 out of 10 years, the more spatially stable the fishery, and therefore the lower the risk of new SAI occurring (See Section 7.d.x)
Index of VME fragmentation/proximity	The spatial extent (size) and location (distance) of VME polygons in relation to their neighbours of the same VME type. The more fragmentation (a low index value) the greater the risk for SAI. (See section 7.d.x).
Number of important functions in unprotected portions of the VME.	The number of functional types that have important associations with VME and are present in unprotected portions of the VME. Functional types that have >50% area overlap with a VME are considered to show important associations with that VME. Because each VME can be associated with multiple functions, the more associated functions present in the unprotected portions of a VME, the greater the risk of SAI occurring at the functional level (See Section 7.d.ix).

The FAO guidelines (FAO, 2009) define SAI as: "*those that compromise ecosystem integrity (i.e., ecosystem structure or function) in a manner that: (i) impairs the ability of affected populations to replace themselves, (ii) degrades the long-term natural productivity of habitats, and (iii) causes, on more than a temporary basis, significant loss of species richness, habitat or community types*". These guidelines also indicate that "*When determining the scale and significance of an impact, the following six criteria should be considered:*

i. *The intensity or severity of the impact at the specific site being affected.*

ii. *The spatial extent of the impact relative to the availability of the habitat type affected.*

iii. *The sensitivity/vulnerability of the ecosystem to the impact.*

iv. *The ability of an ecosystem to recover from harm, and the rate of such recovery.*

v. *The extent to which ecosystem functions may be altered by the impact.*

vi. *The timing and duration of the impact relative to the period in which a species needs the habitat during one or more of its life-history stages*."

While these criteria help evaluating the different factors involved in assessing SAIs, they do not imply that these factors are necessarily independent nor mutually exclusive of one another. For example, the way in which criteria *i* (intensity) and/or *ii* (extent) interact with criterion *iii* (sensitivity) would be expected to impact criterion *iv* (recovery). This also means that any metric aimed at capturing any one specific criterion, would likely contribute to inform the others. Under this premise, the metrics utilized in this SAI were conceptually mapped onto the FAO criteria, focusing on the most obvious/direct connections. This does not preclude metrics from informing the other criteria in more subtle ways and/or through indirect pathways. The basic mapping of the metrics onto the FAO criteria is shown in Table v.3.

Table v.3. Conceptual mapping between SAI metrics and FAO SAI criteria

	FAO SAI Criteria					
SAI Assessment Metrics	**i**	**ii**	**iii**	**iv**	**v**	**vi**
Area/Biomass protected (low risk)	X	X		X	X	
Area/Biomass impacted	X	X			X	X
Area/Biomass at high risk	X	X			X	
Proportion of overlapping VME in closures			X		X	

Index of VME sensitivity			X	X		
Index of fishing stability	X	X				
Index of VME fragmentation/proximity	X	X				
Number of important functions in unprotected VME areas			X	X	X	

The rationale involved in this mapping exercise is summarized in Table v.4.

Table v.4. Rationale for mapping SAI metrics onto FAO SAI criteria.

SAI Assessment Metrics	**Rationale for mapping onto FAO SAI criteria**
Area/Biomass protected (low risk)	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: i. (intensity), ii. (extent), iv. (recovery), v.(functionality) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of both the intensity and extent of an impact by estimating the fraction of a VME not currently exposed to an impact. It also informs an assessment of recovery because protected VMEs are sources of recruitment for recolonization, and contributes to functionality because VME functions are generally expected to scale with the area/biomass of the VME and the status (i.e. protected, at risk, impacted) of that area/biomass.
Area/Biomass impacted	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: i. (intensity), ii. (extent), v.(functionality), vi. (time/duration in relation to habitat use) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of both the intensity and extent of an impact by estimating the fraction of a VME impacted. It also relates to functionality because VME functions are generally expected to scale with the area/biomass of the VME and the status (i.e. protected, at risk, impacted) of that area/biomass, and informs the time/duration of an impact in relation to habitat use because impacted areas are considered to be impaired in the provision of habitat.
Area/Biomass at high risk	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: i.(intensity), ii.(extent), v.(functionality) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of both the intensity and extent of an impact by estimating the fraction of VME at risk of impact. It also relates to functionality because VME functions are generally expected to scale with the area/biomass of the VME and the status (i.e. protected, at risk, impacted) of that area/biomass.
Proportion of overlapping VME in closures	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: iii.(sensitivity), v.(functionality) This metric informs the sensitivity to an impact because each individual VME type has its own sensitivity to physical perturbation, so areas with overlapping VMEs are expected to have a different overall sensitivity compared to those with only a single VME type. It also informs risks to functionality because areas with overlapping VME types are more likely to contribute to more (or more complex) ecosystem functions.

Index of VME sensitivity	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: iii.(sensitivity), iv.(recovery) This metric informs the sensitivity to an impact because each individual VME type has its own sensitivity to physical perturbation. It also informs recovery because the capacity of a VME to tolerate a physical perturbation has direct implications for its persistence, and consequently recovery (i.e. taking this concept to its extreme, only habitats that still exist are able to generate recruitment).
Index of fishing stability	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: i.(intensity), ii.(extent) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of both the intensity and extent of an impact by estimating the spatial consistency of impacted areas over time. The first pass of a bottom trawl through a VME potentially causes the greatest impact to the benthic organisms in the path of the trawl, so a fishery that is stable in space has a lower risk of creating additional 'new' impacts beyond the its core stable area of operation.
Index of VME fragmentation/proximity	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: i.(intensity), ii.(extent) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of both the intensity and extent of an impact by estimating the level of spatial fragmentation of the VME habitat. Current VME habitats are considered remnants of former more extensive distributions, so more fragmented VMEs (e.g., smaller patches and/or more distant patches) are expected to be less capable of tolerating physical perturbation and will therefore be at higher risk of SAI.
Number of important functions in unprotected VME areas	Main FAO criteria informed by this metric: iii.(sensitivity), iv.(recovery), v.(functionality) This metric informs the interpretation and quantification of the sensitivity, recovery and functionality of VMEs in response to bottom trawling by estimating the number of ecological functions potentially impacted in those portions of the VME habitat that remain without protection. The VME types involved inform on sensitivity and recovery (see Index of VME sensitivity above), but here in a context of the associated functions, while the associated functions themselves inform the potential impacts on ecological functionality. Since not all VMEs have important associations with all ecological functions, this metric is restricted to important associations (i.e., functional types that have >50% area overlap with a VME).

It was noted previously by SC that one of the principal limitations of the assessment is that all metrics applied to each VME have equal weight, when it is likely that some of the metrics will have greater importance for the assessment of SAI than others. In addition, greater consistency and objectivity in assigning the categories of 'high, moderate and low' to VME specific metrics has been sought in the present assessment.

For example, SC first considered the full list of SAI criteria (FAO, 2009) with respect to the expanded list of assessment metrics to be applied to the reassessment of bottom fisheries in 2021 (the 2nd SAI assessment). It was noted then that the first two SAI criteria are essentially directly related to the management of the fishing activity and therefore their status and trend will largely drive the responses in the remaining four FAO SAI criteria. Accordingly, the metrics which correspond to the assessment of the first two SAI criteria were considered to be of greater importance (and hence influence), e.g., VME biomass impacted, at risk and protected, and VME fragmentation and fishing stability. Of these the area/biomass protected was considered to be the most important assessment metric as the VME 'protected', 'at risk' and 'impacted' metrics are not mutually exclusive of one another, *e.g.*, an increase in the biomass protected will (by definition) result in a decrease in the combined biomass 'at risk' and 'impacted' categories, and therefore the potential risk of SAI would decrease accordingly. Therefore, by focusing the result of the assessment on the 'protected' VME biomass status, the assessment is essentially one which determines the ***risk of SAI occurring*** rather than an assessment of whether or not ***SAI has occurred***.

In the 1st assessment of SAI, three categories (or scores) of assessment were applied to each metric value, namely, 'high, moderate and low'. The limits used to define the scores were selected to highlight the relative differences between the VME specific metrics. Although in most cases the differences were sufficiently clear to assign either a high or low assessment score to each metric, the actual importance of the values in relation to ecosystem function and impact was not known. For the present assessment, it was considered important to agree and define a set of objective criteria for the SAI assessment scores, especially as applied to the first assessment metric (i.e., area/biomass protected). Also, to ensure consistency between the assessment score categories used in the review of VMEs in 2020 (NAFO SCS Doc. 20/14) and the present assessment of SAI, the same general VME 'protected' score categories (break points) were applied (Table v.5).

Table v.5. Definition of categories used to assess the protection status of VMEs. Status definitions (recommendations) are based on definitions from the online Oxford English Dictionary: Good – To be desired or approved of; Adequate – Satisfactory or acceptable in quantity or quality; Incomplete – Not having the necessary or appropriate parts; Limited – Restricted in size, amount, or extent; Poor – Of low or inferior standard or quality; Inadequate – Lacking in quality or quantity required.

SAI Score[3] Categories	VME Status	Proportion of biomass protected	Projected Connectivity Among Closures	Management Action
Good (Low SAI risk) >60%	Good	> 60% VME Biomass	Good connectivity	Beneficial
	Adequate	> 60% VME Biomass	Limited connectivity or redundancy	Beneficial
Limited (Intermediate SAI risk) 30% - 60%	Incomplete	60% - 30% VME Biomass	Good connectivity	Desirable
	Limited	60% - 30% VME Biomass	Limited connectivity or redundancy	Desirable
Poor (High SAI risk) <30%	Poor	30% - 15% VME Biomass	Limited connectivity or redundancy	Essential
	Inadequate	< 15% of Biomass	Limited connectivity or redundancy	Essential

As some limited fishing activity is known to occur within the area defined as "at risk" SC acknowledges that there is likely to be some impact associated with this effort which is currently not taken into account in the 'impacted' category. As the present assessment has not been able to determine what proportion of the 'at risk' biomass has actually been impacted, the overall weighting of the SAI assessment was therefore based primarily on the 'protected' SAI metric score. The score criteria applied for all the assessment metrics used in the overall assessment of SAI is shown in Table v.6 and the overall assessment of SAI is presented in Table v.7. Results indicated that small gorgonian, black coral, bryozoan and sea squirt VMEs have a high overall risk of SAI, whereas the sponge and large gorgonian VMEs have a low overall risk of SAI. The sea pen VME was assessed as having an intermediate risk of SAI.

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[3] For the review of VMEs (NAFO SCS Doc. 19/25) six assessment categories were used. In the present assessment these have been grouped into three assessment categories as shown.

Table v.6. Overall SAI score category criteria as applied to each of the SAI assessment metrics. The first SAI metric uses the same categories as applied during the 2nd review of VMEs. For each of the remaining SAI metrics the breakpoints were generally set by dividing the range in values by 3 and rounding to the nearest whole number.

SAI metric	**SAI Score Categories**		
	Good **(Low SAI risk)**	**Limited** **(Intermediate SAI risk)**	**Poor** **(High SAI risk)**
VME Protected	> 60%	30% - 60%	< 30%
VME At Risk	-	-	-
VME Impacted	-	-	-
VME Fragmentation/Proximity	>740	340 - 740	< 340
Fishing effort stability Index (over 10 yrs.)	> 60%	30% - 60%	< 30%
VME Sensitivity Index	< 0.5	0.5 - 1	>1
Proportion of VME area/biomass overlapping in closures	> 60%	30% - 60%	< 30%
Number of important functions in unprotected VME	<2	2 - 3	>3

Table v.7. Overall SAI[4] assessment scores for each VME and SAI metric categorised as either good (low risk), limited (intermediate risk), or poor (high risk), following the SAI score categories as defined in Table v.4. The overall SAI Risk is based upon the count of 'poor' and 'good' ratings for each VME using biomass data where appropriate.

	Sponge		Sea pen		Large gorgonian		Small gorgonian		Black Coral		Bryozoan		Sea Squirt	
SAI metric	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**	**Area**	**Biomass**
VME Protected	64%	93%	16%	33%	60%	89%	2%	2%	17%	23%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
VME At Risk	19%	6%	74%	65%	23%	10%	72%	86%	63%	67%	96%	99%	79%	85%
VME Impacted	18%	1%	9%	2%	16%	1%	26%	12%	20%	10%	4%	1%	21%	14%
SAI Risk (biomass)	Low		Intermediate		Low		High		High		High		High	
VME Fragmentation/Proximity	1112		394		255		125		109		717		802	
Fishing effort stability (over 10 yrs.)	82%		39%		44%		80%		54%		0%		39%	
VME Sensitivity	3.3		0.2		1.7		0.5		1.4		0.1		0.5	
Proportion of VME area/biomass overlapping in closures (km² and kg)	62%	99%	19%	42%	65%	82%	9%	9%	21%	23%	4%	3%	0%	0%
Number of important functions in unprotected portions of the VME.	2		4		2		1		3		4		4	
Overall SAI Risk[5]	Low (1, 6)		Intermediate (3, 1)		Low (2, 4)		High (5, 2)		High (6, 0)		High (6, 1)		High (5, 1)	
Ranking for Management Action	**7**		**5**		**6**		**4**		**1**		**2**		**3**	

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[4] Significant Adverse Impact is a term defined by FAO (2009). It does not imply statistical significance, but rather to identify and quantify impacts which are important.

[5] The overall SAI Risk score was calculated by simply counting the number of high-risk category scores (in red) and the low-risk category scores (in green) for both the area and biomass metrics. These numbers are respectively shown in parenthesis. A combination of the high and low SAI risk scores provides the basis for ranking the management priority from high to low.

Part (ii) Potential management options in relation to VME closures

Scientific Council responded:

In evaluating potential management options for the protection of VMEs in the NRA, SC gave careful consideration to the review of existing closures and to the outcome of the SAI assessment in evaluating possible tradeoffs required to achieve appropriate conservation measures, whilst minimizing the possible consequences to ongoing bottom-contact fisheries.

SC recommends improving the protection of VMEs and, as requested, proposes potential management options that appreciably enhance the current protection to VMEs. Collectively, the proposed management options result in NAFO achieving ‘good’ VME protection status for six VMEs and ‘limited’ protection status for one VME. At the same time, the recommended measures result in a less than 1% overall impact on current fishing activities. The **recommended** measures take a system perspective, and include ten extensions to existing closures, the creation of three new closures and modifications to Area 14. Specifically, **SC recommends** the following changes to the existing VME closures:

- Extension of Area Closure 1 (Area 1a), to protect large-sized sponges;
- Establishment of two new closures (Areas 17 & 18) on the tail of the Grand Bank, to protect sea squirts;
- Establishment of a new closure (Area 16) on the tail of the Grand Bank, to protect erect bryozoans;
- Creation of a new closure (Area 15a) to the northeast of the 3O Closure in the NRA, to protect important concentrations of small gorgonian coral, sea pens and large gorgonian coral;
- Westward extension of the Area 2 closure, in the form of the closure of the “notch” on the northwestern side of the Area 2, to better protect large gorgonian coral (Area 2a);
- Northward extension of Area 2, to protect significant concentrations of sea pens and black coral (Area 2b);
- Extension of closures between Area Closures 4 & 5 (Area 4a), to increase protection of large gorgonian coral and large-sized sponges;
- Eastward extension of Area Closure 7, to provide greater protection for sea pens and black coral (Area 7a);
- Extension to Area Closures 8 & 9 (linking with Area Closures 8, 9 & 12), to provide a more continuous closure to protect sea pens and black coral (Areas 8a & 9a) and improve connectivity;
- Westward extension to Area Closure 10, to provide combined protection for sea pens and large-sized sponges (Area 10a);
- Northeastward extension of Area Closure 11, to provide enhanced protection for sea pens (Area 11a);
- Re-establishment of a modified Area Closure 14 (Areas 14a & 14b), over areas of high sea pen concentrations in the eastern portion of the Flemish Cap.

No changes to Area Closure 3 and Area Closure 13 are necessary.

The 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) – an implementing agreement to UNCLOS – in giving effect to the duty to cooperate under UNCLOS and in order to conserve and manage straddling and highly migratory fish stocks, obliges coastal State Parties and Parties fishing on the high seas to “assess the impacts of fishing, other human activities and environmental factors on target stocks and species belonging to the same ecosystem or associated with or dependent upon the target stocks"[6]. Further to these, UNGA Resolution 61/105 calls upon RFMOs to exclude bottom contact fishing from those areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur until management measures to prevent SAIs have been established[7]. The NAFO Convention recalls the relevant provisions of UNCLOS and UNFSA and takes relevant FAO instruments[8] into account. More specifically, the NAFO Convention is to be interpreted and applied consistently with UNCLOS and UNFSA[9]. Furthermore, the Convention commits its Parties to apply an ecosystem approach to fisheries management[10] in the Northwest Atlantic that includes safeguarding the marine environment, conserving its marine biodiversity, minimizing the risk of long term or irreversible adverse effects of fishing activities and taking account of the relationship between all components of the ecosystem[11]. Article III of the Convention obliges its Contracting Parties to take due account of the fishing impacts on other species and marine ecosystems by adopting measures to minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems[12].

Review of existing closures by SC in 2020 (SCS Doc. 20/14) revealed that increased protection was essential for five of seven VMEs in the NRA (small gorgonian coral, sea squirts (*Boltenia ovifera*), erect bryozoans, black coral and sea pens) and desirable to beneficial for large gorgonian coral and large-sized sponge VMEs. As a result, expert groups with diverse scientific and fisheries management expertise evaluated the benefits and consequences of extensions to existing closures, as well as the addition of areas in instances where no protection existed (SCS Doc. 20/23).

In evaluating potential management options for the protection of VMEs in the NRA, the subject matter experts gave careful consideration to the review of existing closures and the outcome of the SAI in evaluating the possible tradeoffs required to achieve appropriate conservation measures and their possible consequences to ongoing bottom-contact fisheries. There are no established rules to quantify such tradeoffs, but the basic principles applied in expert deliberations were to reduce the risk of SAI and to the protection of VMEs, while limiting potential losses to harvesters relative to the overall activities for all fisheries monitored in the NRA. SC's empirical approach relied on expertise from fishery and ecosystem scientists, which could have been augmented using algorithmic methods (e.g., MARXAN). However, application of algorithmic methods would have required development of cost-benefit weighting criteria for conservation potential and the risk of adverse impact for each VME and fishery; this would have required considerable investment in effort and time by SC with no certainty of improvement in the overall outcome. Prior experiences by expert participants using algorithmic approaches have led to the conclusion that, while such methods can be very useful, especially in cases with multiple competing objectives, the final delineation of options always require expert input. In the case here, given the rather straightforward nature of the tradeoff involved, the diversity of expertise and knowledge brought together for this exercise, and the expediency that the issue requires, SC is confident that these results are reasonably close to an optimal solution. The careful balancing of improvement in the protection of VMEs while limiting potential losses to harvesters by SC experts is demonstrated in the overall results of the analyses described below.

Estimates of biomass and areas of high concentration of large-sized sponges, sea pens, sea squirts, erect bryozoans, black coral, large gorgonian coral and small gorgonian coral generated from the output kernel density raster surfaces, with an increased resolution of 1 km^2, served as the foundation in the development of

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[6] UNFSA, Art 5 (d).

[7] UNGA Resolution 61/105. Art. 83(c).

[8] NAFO Convention. See 2nd and 3rd preamble paragraphs.

[9] NAFO Convention, Art. XXI (2).

[10] Technical guidance on the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries is elaborated under the FAO*, The* ecosystem *approach to fisheries. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries*. No. 4, Suppl. 2. Rome, FAO. 2003. 112 p.; See also FAO*, The ecosystem approach to fisheries. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries*. No. 4, Suppl. 2, Add. 2. Rome, FAO. 2009. 88p.

[11] NAFO Convention, 8th preamble para. See also Article II, which states the Convention's objective to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fishing resources in the Convention Area by safeguarding the marine ecosystems in which these resources are found.

[12] NAFO Convention, Art. III (d).

management options. Two elements were overlaid for each VME to identify areas of high concentrations that could be considered at lower risk because of limited fishing activity: [1] an estimate of fishing stability (2010-2019) with VME catches above the effort cut-off threshold (i.e., level of fishing effort corresponding to an 'impacted' compared to an 'at risk' state based on the point at which 95% of the biomass is accumulated) (NAFO 2020b) for each VME taxon (years fished·km^{-2}); [2] VME polygons and closures along with VME catches above the biomass threshold (i.e., significant research vessel catch concentration based on Kernel Density estimation as defined in SCS 13/024) (NAFO 2020b). Boundaries were chosen to ensure the incorporation of known observations of high VME biomass to avoid potential impact by exposure to fishing activity.

Potential changes to existing closures were evaluated relative to the distribution of overall fishing effort (km·km^{-2}·year^{-1}) from trawl fisheries in the NRA between 2010–2019 based on VMS data, as presented in Figure v.2. The consequences to fisheries of any potential changes to existing closures were estimated based on the average haul-by-haul total and species specific catch biomass per distance of trawling (kg·km^{-1}) provided by the Secretariat (2016-2019) and matched to VMS data (NAFO 2020b), and cumulative fishing effort (fishing effort × years fished [2010-2019]) averaged over the number of years each fishery (cod, redfish, Greenland halibut, skate, and total across all species) was active.

Expert assessment of potential management options was based on the outcome of the re-assessment of VME closures (SCS Doc. 20/14) and evaluation of risk of significant adverse impact. This yielded proposals for ten extensions to existing closures, the creation of three new closures and modifications to Area 14 (Figure v.10).

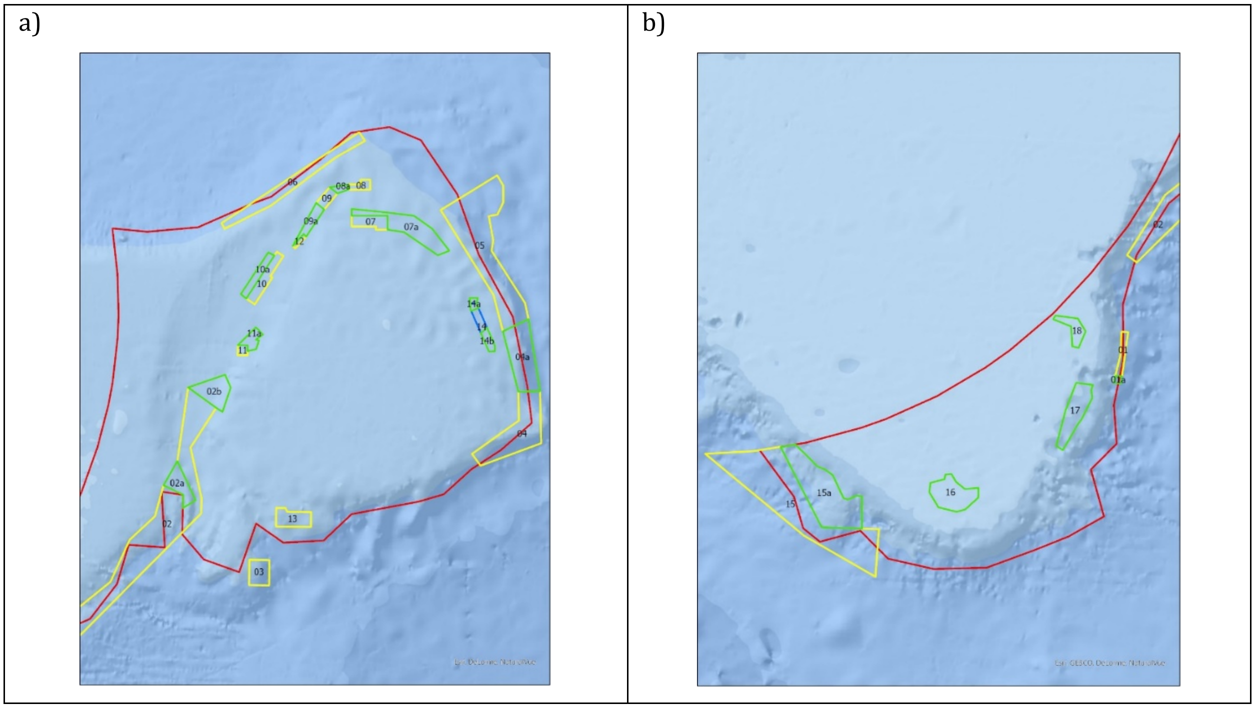


Figure v.10. Location of existing closures (in yellow) proposed extensions and new closures (in green), and removals (in blue) in a) the northern, and b) the southern portions of the NRA. The fishing footprint is indicated in red. Numerals represent existing or proposed new closures; number-letter combinations represent extensions or modifications to existing closures.

In general, high concentrations of VMEs occurred in areas with low fishing effort over a 10-year period (Figure v.2) which provides further evidence that the current distribution of high concentrations of VMEs very likely represents remnants of populations that were present before the onset of extensive and intensive trawl fisheries. Separation between the occurrence of VMEs from fishing effort together with stability reflected the vulnerability of each VME taxon to encounters with trawls based on the biomass threshold (high – large gorgonian coral, large-sized sponges, black coral; intermediate – sea squirts, small gorgonian coral; low – sea pens, erect bryozoans). Because of the sensitivity and long periods required for VMEs to recover from the impacts of bottom contact gear, the overall negative mirror-image in the distribution of high concentrations of VMEs and fishing effort likely reflects the outcome of long-term patterns in fishing activity in the NRA.

Area 1 – Tail of the Grand Bank large-sized sponge Closure

The tail of the Grand Bank has important concentrations of large-sized sponges, sea squirts, erect bryozoans, sea pens, and small and large gorgonian coral. There is strong stability in fishing activity to the west of the Area 1 large-sized sponge Closure, but limited fishing activity at the southern end of the closure where large-sized sponge concentrations above the biomass threshold occur. **SC recommends an extension of the Area Closure 1 (Area 1a).**

Sea squirts are broadly distributed along the eastern edge of the tail of the Grand Bank. There are notable occurrences of catches above the biomass threshold in areas with limited fishing activity in the northern-most polygon located east of the Southeast Shoal and in the northern portion of the VME polygon along the eastern portion of the tail of the Grand Bank. Given the very limited protection for sea squirts (<1% area; 1% biomass), **SC recommends the establishment of two new closures (Areas 17 & 18)**.

Erect bryozoans are also broadly distributed over the tail of the Grand Bank, but mostly in shallow areas. Two large areas with a high occurrence of catches above the biomass threshold were found west of the large sea squirt polygon, and fishing stability above the effort cut-off threshold is very limited over the large southwestern polygon. **SC recommends the establishment of a new closure (Area 16)**.

Southwestern Tail of Grand Bank

SCS Doc. 19/25 identified important concentrations of small gorgonian coral, sea pens and large gorgonian coral on the southwestern edge of the tail of the Grand Bank, in close proximity to the 3O coral Closure. Evaluation of fishing activities relative to the distribution of small gorgonian coral and sea pens revealed similar bathymetrically constrained areas of high fishing stability, below which catches above the biomass threshold of small gorgonian coral, sea pens and large gorgonian coral occur. **SC recommends the creation of a new closure (Area 15a) to the northeast of the 3O closure in the NRA, to protect important concentrations of small gorgonian coral, sea pens and large gorgonian coral**.

Area 2 large-sized sponge Closure

Large aggregations of large-sized sponges, large gorgonian coral, sea pens and black coral occur in the vicinity of the Area 2 large-sized sponge Closure. There is considerable overlap of large-sized sponges and large gorgonian coral, while sea pens and black coral co-occur in the northern part of Area 2 Closure. The improved delineation of sea pen and black coral polygons has identified several locations outside the Area 2 Closure where concentrations above the biomass threshold occur, and there is limited stability in fishing pressure above the effort cut-off threshold for both taxa. There is very limited fishing activity in the Area 2 "notch" on the northwestern side of the Area 2 closure, where there is a high occurrence of catches above the biomass threshold for large gorgonian coral. Given the occurrence of catches above the biomass threshold for sea pens, black coral and large gorgonian coral in parts of the VME polygons with very limited fishing stability, **SC recommends that two extensions to the Area 2 closure be put in place in the form of the closure of the "notch" on the northwestern side of the Area 2 to better protect large gorgonian coral (Area 2a), and a northward extension of Area 2 to protect significant concentrations of sea pens and black coral (Area 2b)**.

Area 3 and 13 Large-sized sponge and large gorgonian coral Closures

Although there have been changes to the VME polygons associated with Area 3 and 13 Closures based on the further data now available (SCS Doc. 19/25), the occurrence of VME concentrations above the biomass thresholds for both large-sized sponges and large gorgonian corals generally coincide with these two closures. There is no occurrence of fishing activity above the appropriate effort cut-off thresholds for these two VMEs. As a result, **SC concludes that no changes to Area 3 and Area 13 Closures are necessary**.

Eastern Flemish Cap Area 4 & 5 Large-sized sponge and large gorgonian coral Closures

There is one major area with high concentrations of large gorgonian coral and two areas with high concentrations of large-sized sponges along the eastern portion of the Flemish Cap. However, there are very few observations from scientific surveys between the two closures because the area is difficult to trawl. There is limited overall fishing activity by vessels using bottom-contact gear between Area 4 & 5 Closures, likely because of the steep topography and unsuitable nature of the bottom for trawling. **SC recommends that an extension of closures between Areas Closures 4 & 5 (Area 4a) be implemented to increase protection of large gorgonian coral and large-sized sponges**.

Northwestern Flemish Cap Area 6 to 12 Closures

Extensive VME polygons for large-sized sponges, sea pens, small gorgonian coral and black coral have been identified on the northwestern portion of the Flemish Cap, where there is an important Area Closure for large-sized sponge (Area 6) and several small Area Closures for sea pens (Areas 7-12). There is also extensive overlap among VME polygons for these four VMEs. Existing Area Closures provide protection for a high proportion of VME catches above the biomass threshold for each taxon, but the review of closures has also identified many sites with high VME concentrations where there is currently little or no protection.

Fishing stability above the effort cut-off threshold overlaps with the black coral VME polygon to the east of Area Closure 9. A polygon for small gorgonian coral is associated with Area Closure 7, and overlaps with moderate fishing stability. Sea pens are broadly distributed in this part of Flemish Cap and have a relatively high fishing effort cut-off threshold ($4.3\ \mathrm{km{\cdot}km^{-2}{\cdot}y^{-1}}$), but the overlap of areas of high fishing stability with sea pens polygons is limited to areas east of Area Closures 9, 10 and 11. Catches of large-sized sponges above the biomass threshold have been identified to the east and west of Area Closure 10 and coincide with low levels of fishing stability. As a result of the limited overlap of high VME concentrations with fishing activity, **SC recommends;**

- An eastward extension of Area Closure 7 to provide greater protection for sea pens and black coral (Area 7a);
- The extension to Area Closures 8 and 9 (linking with Area Closures 8, 9 and 12) to provide a more continuous Closure to protect sea pens and black coral (Areas 8a and 9a) and improve connectivity;
- A westward extension to Area Closure 10 to provide combined protection for sea pens and large-sized sponges (Area 10a);
- A northeastward extension of Area Closure 11 to provide enhanced protection for sea pens (Area 11a).

Area 14 Sea Pen Closure

Area Closure 14 (sea pens) was established in January 2017 and re-opened to fishing in December 2018 (SCS Doc. 19/25). There are strong indications of important concentrations of sea pen VMEs in the eastern portion of the Flemish Cap, and to the west of Area Closure 5 although the re-assessment of the closures (NAFO 2020) resulted in a substantial reduction in the area of the VME polygon associated with Area Closure 14 relative to the previous assessment. There are low levels of fishing stability associated with these sea pen polygons. Owing to the importance of Area 14 to the connectivity among areas of high sea pen concentration, **SC recommends the re-establishment of a modified Area 14 (Areas 14a & 14b) over areas of high sea pen concentrations in the eastern portion of the Flemish Cap**.

Management Options – VME Protection, Fishery Activity and Catches

Re-assessment of the effectiveness of NAFO Area Closures by SC in 2020 (SCS Doc. 20/14) concluded that protection was inadequate for three VME taxa (small gorgonian coral, sea squirts and erect bryozoans), poor for two VME taxa (black coral and sea pens), which implied that management action was considered essential. While two VME taxa (large gorgonian coral and large-sized sponges) had incomplete to good protection, management action was considered desirable to beneficial, though not essential (SCS Doc. 20/14). Proposed extensions of and modifications to existing closures, and the implementation of three new closures, would result in an overall areal protection ranging from 21 to 68% of VMEs, with increases in protection ranging from 4 to 55%, and overall biomass protection ranging from 32 to 96%, constituting increases in protection ranging from 3 to 78% relative to the reassessment of existing Area Closures (Tables v.8 and v.9).

Based on the haul-by-haul data for the period 2016-2019, a total of 47 492 km^2 over the entire NRA was fished with an associated catch. Total catch per effort ranged from 0.5 to 51 536 kg·km^{-1} (median: 3563). Of the area fished, 9468 km^2 overlapped with VME polygons (excluding closures), with total catch per effort ranging from 37 to 33 872 kg·km^{-1} (median: 3780). Of the area overlapping VMEs, only 366 km^2 overlapped with the proposed changes to existing closures (0.77% of the total area fished), with total catch per effort ranging from 319 to 17 146 kg·km^{-1} (median: 3511).

The direct impact of the new closures to the total catches and to catches of five important fishery species are detailed in Table v.10. Overall, approximately 28.5% of effort occurs in VME polygons, while approximately 20% of the total catches occur in VME polygons. The proposed closures would result in a 0.61% loss of total average effort and a 0.75% loss of total average catch. The losses from the proposed changes to VME Closures could be compensated by a very minor adjustment in the spatial distribution of fishing effort, and such changes are very small relative to inter-annual changes in TACs associated with changes in population abundance.

Potential future changes in the distribution of fishing activity as a result of changes in population status (i.e., abundance and biomass) and environmental conditions over periods longer than the data available for the current assessments of current Area Closures, together with the risk of significant adverse impacts, are very likely reflected in the negative mirror distributions in areas of high concentrations of VMEs and the distribution of fishing effort. Currently, ~88% of the average cumulated effort (km·km^{-2}) occurs in less than 58% [about 42%] of the area (km^2) over which effort occurred for 6-10 years during 2010-2019, providing opportunity for potential compensatory expansion of fishing activities in areas where VMEs are unlikely to occur in high concentrations.

Table v.8. Total area and percent of total area for VMEs within the polygons estimated from Kernel Density estimates, Closed Areas, Conditionally Protected (outside closures and outside fishing footprint), Protected Overall (sum of protected biomass inside and outside fishing footprint) and Unprotected, for Existing Closures (including Area 14 but excluding 3O Closure) together with Existing + Proposed Closures.

Existing Closures (excluding Area 14, excluding 3O)

	VME Polygons	Closed Area		Conditionally Protected		Protected Overall		Unprotected	
VME	Area (km^2)	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent
Black coral	2,799	521	19%	0	0%	521	19%	2,278	81%
Erect bryozoans	3,498	5	0%	0	0%	5	0%	3,493	100%
Large gorgonian coral	5,415	2,918	54%	316	6%	3,234	60%	2,181	40%
Sea pens	9,085	1,459	16%	1	0%	1,460	16%	7,625	84%
Sea squirts	4,081	0	0%	17	0%	17	0%	4,064	100%
Small gorgonian coral	4,756	84	2%	0	0%	84	2%	4,672	98%
Large-sized sponges	26,011	10,163	39%	6,409	25%	16,572	64%	9,439	36%

Existing + Newly Proposed Closures

	VME Polygons	Closed Area		Conditionally Protected		Protected Overall		Unprotected	
VME	Area (km^2)	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent	Area (km^2)	Percent
Black coral	2,799	1,543	55%	0	0%	1,543	55%	1,256	45%
Erect bryozoans	3,498	690	20%	0	0%	690	20%	2,808	80%
Large gorgonian coral	5,415	3,346	62%	316	6%	3,662	68%	1,753	32%
Sea pens	9,085	4,093	45%	1	0%	4,094	45%	4,991	55%
Sea squirts	4,081	856	21%	17	0%	873	21%	3,208	79%
Small gorgonian coral	4,756	1,752	37%	0	0%	1,752	37%	3,004	63%
Large-sized sponges	26,011	11,483	44%	6,032	23%	17,516	67%	8,495	33%

Table v.9. Total biomass and percent of total biomass for VMEs within the polygons estimated from Kernel Density estimates, Closed Areas, Conditionally Protected (outside closures and outside fishing footprint), closed areas within the fishing footprint, conditionally protected outside fishing footprint, protected overall (sum of protected biomass inside and outside fishing footprint) and unprotected for existing closures (including Area 14 but excluding 3O closure), together with existing + proposed closures.

Existing Closures (excluding area 14, excluding 3O)

	VME Polygons	Closed Area		Conditionally Protected		Protected Overall		Unprotected	
VME	Biomass (kg)	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent
Black coral	10,441	2,615	25%	0	0%	2,615	25%	7,826	75%
Erect bryozoans	65,567	4	0%	0	0%	4	0%	65,563	100%
Large gorgonian coral	133,448	97,157	73%	19,808	15%	116,965	88%	16,483	12%
Sea pens	100,244	32,900	33%	24	0%	32,924	33%	67,320	67%
Sea squirts	41,572	0	0%	215	1%	215	1%	41,357	99%
Small gorgonian coral	3,351	61	2%	0	0%	61	2%	3,290	98%
Large-sized sponges	276,985,425	212,834,753	77%	44,191,066	16%	257,025,819	93%	19,959,606	7%

Existing + Newly Proposed Closures

	VME Polygons	Closed Area		Conditionally Protected		Protected Overall		Unprotected	
VME	Biomass (kg)	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent	Biomass (kg)	Percent
Black coral	10,441	8,002	77%	0	0%	8,002	77%	2,439	23%
Erect bryozoans	65,567	50,856	78%	0	0%	50,856	78%	14,711	22%
Large gorgonian coral	133,448	99,651	75%	19,808	15%	119,460	90%	13,988	10%
Sea pens	100,244	64,272	64%	24	0%	64,296	64%	35,948	36%
Sea squirts	41,572	24,635	59%	215	1%	24,850	60%	16,722	40%
Small gorgonian coral	3,351	1,067	32%	0	0%	1,067	32%	2,285	68%
Large-sized sponges	276,985,425	244,258,553	88%	20,875,096	8%	265,133,649	96%	11,851,776	4%

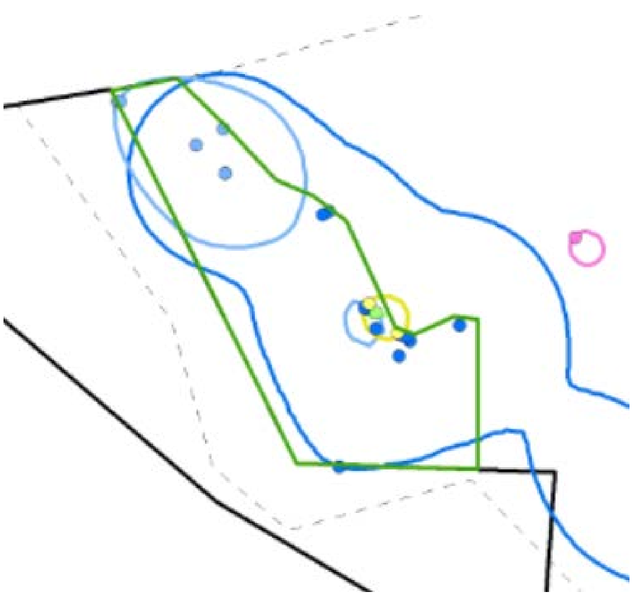
Table v.10. Percent of total effort (2010-2019, no discrimination among fisheries) and percent of total average catch (2016-2019, discriminating key fishery species) overlapping with VME polygons. Percentages represent values relative to total effort and total catch over the entire NRA. Current refers to Existing Closures (excluding Area 14 and 3O Coral Closures); Current + Proposed refers to Existing and Proposed Closures. Note that estimates of percent effort and percent catch for individual VME taxa do not take overlap with other VME taxa into account. "All VMEs combined" allows for calculations of the percent of total effort and of total average catch without double counting overlapping VMEs.

Percent of Effort from VMEs	**All VMEs**	**Black coral**	**Sea squirts**	**Erect bryozoans**	**Small gorgonian coral**	**Sea pens**	**Large gorgonian coral**	**Sponges**
All fisheries								
Percent Effort Current	28.494	0.676	2.670	1.445	2.594	4.079	10.283	9.842
Percent Effort Current + Proposed	27.884	0.515	2.572	1.409	2.573	3.777	10.071	9.828
Percent Difference	-0.610	-0.161	-0.098	-0.036	-0.021	-0.302	-0.212	-0.014

Percent of Catch from VMEs	**All VMEs**	**Black coral**	**Sea squirts**	**Erect bryozoans**	**Small gorgonian coral**	**Sea pens**	**Large gorgonian coral**	**Sponges**
All Fisheries								
Percent Catch Current	20.106	1.422	2.632	2.552	2.674	4.158	3.375	5.876
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	19.354	1.255	2.588	2.548	2.549	3.792	3.135	5.814
Percent Difference	-0.752	-0.166	-0.044	-0.005	-0.125	-0.366	-0.239	-0.062
Cod								
Percent Catch Current	5.752	0.053	0.535	0.331	3.975	0.089	0.314	0.562
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	5.729	0.053	0.530	0.325	3.972	0.087	0.305	0.561
Percent Difference	-0.023	0.000	-0.005	-0.006	-0.003	-0.002	-0.009	-0.002
Greenland Halibut								
Percent Catch Current	39.132	3.157	0.383	0.004	2.344	13.098	1.767	23.404
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	37.822	2.592	0.383	0.004	2.342	11.939	1.589	23.347
Percent Difference	-1.310	-0.566	0.000	0.000	-0.001	-1.159	-0.178	-0.057
Redfish								
Percent Catch Current	21.213	1.054	9.429	0.313	2.441	2.087	6.281	1.566
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	20.561	1.054	9.379	0.313	2.256	1.907	5.942	1.459
Percent Difference	-0.652	-0.001	-0.050	0.000	-0.185	-0.180	-0.339	-0.107

Skate								
Percent Catch Current	15.942	0.068	3.359	11.105	0.090	0.190	1.553	0.330
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	15.706	0.064	3.216	11.061	0.080	0.176	1.511	0.327
Percent Difference	-0.236	-0.004	-0.143	-0.043	-0.010	-0.014	-0.042	-0.003
Yellowtail flounder								
Percent Catch Current	28.692	0.000	4.936	24.018	0.003	0.010	0.148	0.007
Percent Catch Current + Proposed	28.154	0.000	4.869	23.552	0.000	0.009	0.142	0.007
Percent Difference	-0.539	0.000	-0.067	-0.465	-0.003	-0.002	-0.007	0.000

Area 15a



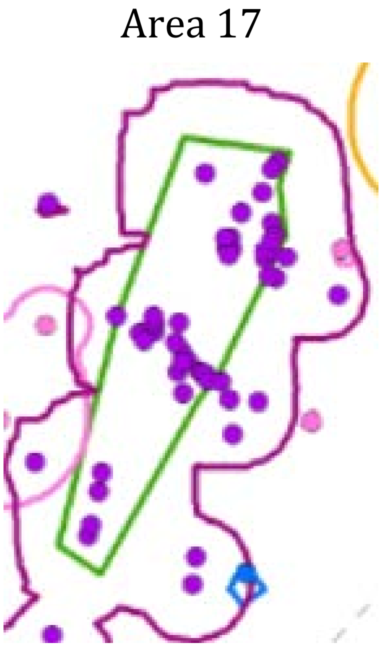
Latitude	Longitude
43.08257 N	51.34857 W
43.07500 N	51.30799 W
43.10609 N	51.22945 W
43.10403 N	51.17983 W
42.87897 N	51.15700 W
42.86778 N	51.52889 W
43.18927 N	51.79235 W
43.40361 N	51.97000 W
43.42934 N	51.83784 W
43.36821 N	51.73464 W
43.29003 N	51.61594 W
43.27069 N	51.53741 W
43.23694 N	51.46538 W
43.08257 N	51.34857 W

Figure v.11. Decimal coordinates for proposed Area Closure 15a. Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 16

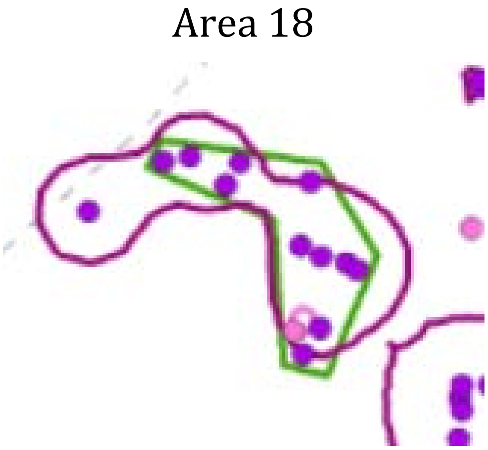
Latitude	Longitude
43.16494 N	50.55787 W
43.23062 N	50.55408 W
43.26304 N	50.42504 W
43.29544 N	50.41978 W
43.30229 N	50.36430 W
43.24879 N	50.31657 W
43.20279 N	50.22954 W
43.21674 N	50.10497 W
43.14914 N	50.10001 W
43.06057 N	50.21448 W
43.04049 N	50.29363 W
43.06389 N	50.46425 W
43.16494 N	50.55787 W

Figure v.12. Decimal coordinates for proposed Area Closure 16. Area labels as in Figure v.10.



Latitude	Longitude
43.54086 N	49.40267 W
43.79167 N	49.33333 W
43.98800 N	49.24760 W
43.97838 N	49.08808 W
43.94285 N	49.10246 W
43.88806 N	49.08831 W
43.73380 N	49.17938 W
43.70567 N	49.20598 W
43.51276 N	49.33884 W
43.54086 N	49.40267 W

Figure v.13. Decimal coordinates for proposed Area Closure 17. Area labels as in Figure v.10.



Latitude	Longitude
44.24110 N	49.30176 W
44.37984 N	49.32388 W
44.42318 N	49.49658 W
44.45008 N	49.47870 W
44.43734 N	49.26429 W
44.35077 N	49.18364 W
44.23285 N	49.24218 W
44.24110 N	49.30176 W

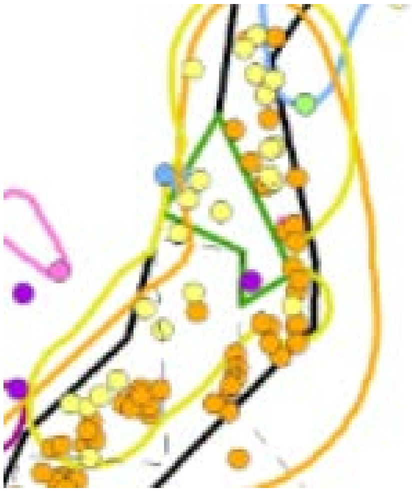
Figure v.14. Decimal coordinates for proposed Area Closure 18. Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 1a

Latitude	Longitude
44.04850 N	48.88119 W
44.04828 N	48.81930 W
43.99931 N	48.82402 W
44.00031 N	48.89132 W
44.04850 N	48.88119 W

Figure v.15. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 1 (Area 1a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 2a



Latitude	Longitude
46.50617 N	47.18415 W
46.67800 N	47.05130 W
46.40669 N	46.85639 W
46.35133 N	46.98139 W
46.44222 N	46.98139 W
46.50617 N	47.18415 W

Figure v.16. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 2 (Area 2a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 2b

Latitude	Longitude
47.19639 N	46.96058 W
47.29139 N	46.58349 W
47.20159 N	46.52367 W
47.03052 N	46.60236 W
47.05808 N	46.66790 W
47.19639 N	46.96058 W

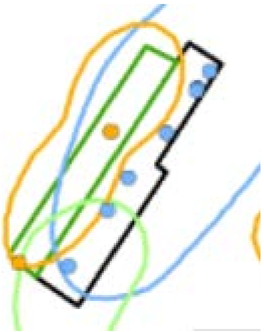
Figure v.17. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 2 (Area 2b). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 11a

Latitude	Longitude
47.50040 N	46.45919 W
47.62746 N	46.27531 W
47.57767 N	46.20109 W
47.54136 N	46.27405 W
47.53611 N	46.24163 W
47.47439 N	46.26826 W
47.46008 N	46.35658 W
47.50040 N	46.35658 W
47.50040 N	46.45919 W

Figure v.18. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 11 (Area 11a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

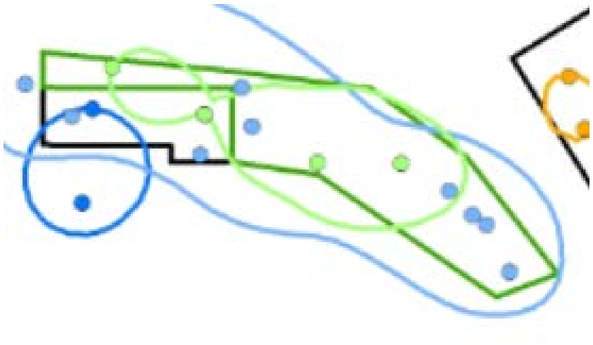
Area 10a



Latitude	Longitude
47.82819 N	46.38003 W
47.85837 N	46.43767 W
48.15374 N	46.15862 W
48.13325 N	46.09395 W
47.82819 N	46.38003 W

Figure v.19. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 10 (Area 10a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

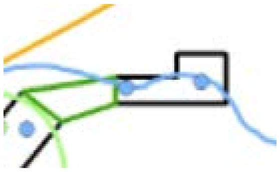
Area 7a



Latitude	Longitude
48.16916 N	44.26527 W
48.13845 N	44.38627 W
48.30190 N	44.73967 W
48.31908 N	44.91058 W
48.41728 N	44.91058 W
48.41728 N	45.28789 W
48.46450 N	45.28868 W
48.43927 N	44.90961 W
48.41587 N	44.63289 W
48.32513 N	44.44400 W
48.16916 N	44.26527 W

Figure v.20. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 7 (Area 7a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

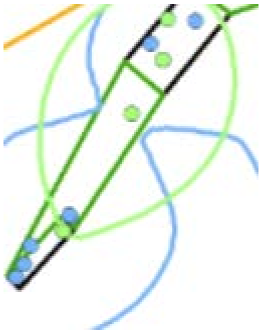
Area 8a



Latitude	Longitude
48.61528 N	45.52108 W
48.63553 N	45.32553 W
48.59900 N	45.32553 W
48.57319 N	45.43858 W
48.61528 N	45.52108 W

Figure v.21. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 8 (Area 8a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 9a



Latitude	Longitude
48.45850 N	45.57789 W
48.26863 N	45.76336 W
48.28661 N	45.79036 W
48.20183 N	45.90358 W
48.50508 N	45.66178 W
48.45850 N	45.57789 W

Figure v.22. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closure 9 (Area 9a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 14a

Latitude	Longitude
47.75679 N	44.05179 W
47.79843 N	44.05179 W
47.83648 N	44.05958 W
47.83635 N	43.97472 W
47.79843 N	43.98983 W
47.76533 N	43.96915 W
47.74572 N	44.04486 W
47.75679 N	44.05179 W

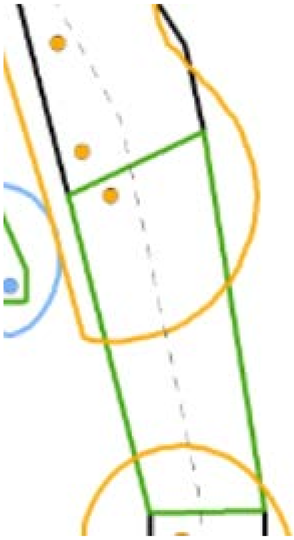
Figure v.23. Decimal coordinates for proposed modification of Area Closure 14 (Area 14a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 14b

Latitude	Longitude
47.58938 N	43.94725 W
47.62598 N	43.88236 W
47.50133 N	43.80515 W
47.45969 N	43.80515 W
47.45969 N	43.86676 W
47.58938 N	43.94725 W

Figure v.24. Decimal coordinates for proposed modification of Area Closure 14 (Area 14b). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Area 4a



Latitude	Longitude
47.17500 N	43.57120 W
47.59928 N	43.71920 W
47.68178 N	43.45186 W
47.17500 N	43.34770 W
47.17500 N	43.57120 W

Figure v.25. Decimal coordinates for proposed extension for Area Closures 4 & 5 (Area 4a). Area labels as in Figure v.10.

Part (iii) Review of seamount closure boundaries

Scientific Council responded:

SC **recommends** changes to the existing boundaries for the Fogo, Newfoundland and Corner Rise Seamount closures, as well as the implementation of seven new individual seamount closures in the NRA north of Orphan Knoll. The proposed revisions for all seamounts in the NRA supersede the 2020 SC advice on this topic. SC notes that current and proposed seamount closures have no impact on ongoing fishing activities. All seamounts and current seamount closures fall outside the NAFO fishing footprint. There are no bottom-contacting fishing activities outside the NAFO fishing footprint, and any exploratory bottom fishing activity in this area is subject to the provisions of Chapter 2 of the NCEM, including the prohibition of bottom-contact fishing within seamount closures.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 59/25 calling for urgent action to protect VMEs from destructive fishing practices in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) was adopted in 2004 (A/RES/59/25 https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/59/25). RFMOs responded promptly, and on January 1 of 2005, NEAFC closed the Hecate and Faraday Seamounts, the Altair Seamounts and the Antialtair Seamounts to bottom trawling and fishing with static gear (NEAFC 2004). In 2006, UNGA resolution 61/105 was adopted (https://undocs.org/A/RES/61/105), elaborating on a series of actions to be taken by States and RFMOs for the protection of VMEs. Effective January 1, 2007, both SEAFO and NAFO introduced closures to protect seamounts in accordance with those UNGA resolutions. SEAFO, an area with a large number of seamounts, closed seven areas with seamounts, including one area in which ten seamounts were known to be present (http://www.fao.org/fishery/vme/24238/170275/en). NAFO closed the Newfoundland Seamounts, the New England Seamounts, the Corner Rise Seamounts and the Orphan Knoll following a review of seamounts in the NAFO Convention Area (Kulka et al., 2007). The Fogo Seamounts were later identified and closed effective January 1, 2009. Both the Corner and the New England Seamount chains extend into the Western Central

Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) mandate area. In 2016, WECAFC assigned the status of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) to Corner Seamounts, New England Seamounts, Wyoming Seamounts and Congress and Lynch Seamounts, all of which border on the NAFO Convention Area. No further changes to the NAFO Seamount closures were made until 2017 when the boundaries of the New England Seamount Chain were extended, effective January 1, 2018, to connect across to the EEZ of the United States of America (COM Doc. 18-01).

In 2020, as part of the review of the VME closures, SC concluded that the available information supported the continued designation of these areas as VMEs (SCS Doc. 20/14). At that time SC proposed new boundaries for the Corner Rise Seamounts and Newfoundland Seamounts, to maintain connectivity across the seamount chains and to improve the protection of vulnerable seamounts in the NRA. The SC seamount recommendations in 2020 were, however, not adopted; given the availability of new bathymetric data towards the end of 2020, SC has taken the opportunity to undertake a more extensive review of the seamounts in the NAFO Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).

The history of development of NAFO seamount closures since the mid-2000s, and the evolving analyses that supported this process over time, has resulted in an inconsistent approach to seamount protection, giving rise to some seamounts in a local area being protected whilst others at a similar depth were left outside the seamount closures. Therefore, since 2019 SC has undertaken a systematic review of all seamount closed areas to ensure a consistency of approach that should reduce the need for any further revision unless new information emerges.

SC also notes that current and proposed seamount closures have no impact on ongoing fishing activities. All seamounts and current seamount closures fall outside the NAFO fishing footprint. There is no bottom-contact fishing activity outside the NAFO fishing footprint, and any exploratory bottom fishing activity in this area is subject to the provisions of Chapter 2 of the NCEM, including the prohibition of bottom-contact fishing within seamount closures.

Since the last seamount assessment in 2019 (SCS Doc. 19/25), new information on VMEs in the seamounts from the NRA has been published, which supports the designation of these areas. A new species of sponge, *Tedania* (*Tedaniopsis*) *rappi*, of 25 cm (width) x 15 cm (height), collected during the Canadian mission HUD2010-029 and the British RRS Discovery Cruise DY081, has been described in the Orphan Seamount within the Orphan Knoll closed area between 3000 and 3450 m depth (Ríos et al. 2021). Additionally, Lapointe et al. (2020) have described the megabenthic assemblages in the lower bathyal (700 – 3000 m) on the New England and Corner Rise Seamounts, based on 34 dives which took place from 2003 to 2014 on 17 seamounts/peaks and over 400 hours of bottom time video.

SC's primary source for the identification of seamounts is the publication by Kim and Wessel (2011). They used altimetry-derived gravity data available at that time to identify morphological features extracted from the geometry of the contours (base dimensions, height etc.). A similar database by Yesson and colleagues (2011) was cross-referenced but was not used as the primary source of information as its scope was different from SC's purposes and some of their seamount locations off the tail of the Grand Bank have been shown to be invalid from the NEREIDA multibeam surveys (SCS Doc. 11/022). There are few data of the occurrence of VME on seamounts with peaks deeper than 4000 m. Furthermore, given that most seamount fisheries operate up to 2000 m, and considering current technological limitations, a precautionary depth limit for bottom-contacting fishing for this assessment was set at 4000 m. As a result seamounts with peaks below 4000 m were not considered in the current SC review.

Fogo Seamount Chain: The current closures in the Fogo Seamounts protect only three seamounts between 3000 and 3500 m depth. Several seamounts between 2500 and 4000 m depth are found south of the Tail of the Grand Bank. **SC recommends boundary changes to the current closures to protect the seamounts shallower than 4000 m depth to complete the protection of all vulnerable seamounts in the area**.

Newfoundland Seamount Chain: The current closure includes seamounts with peaks ranging from 2446-3756 m. There are three other seamounts in this depth range that are not within the boundaries of the current closure (depth range of 3192-3617 m). **SC recommends boundary revisions to ensure inclusion of the 15 seamounts in the Newfoundland Seamount Chain with peak depths ranging between 2446 and 3756 m**.

Corner Rise Seamount Chain: In 2020 SC proposed boundaries included 18 seamounts ranging in depth from 913-3319 m. To ensure consistency in approach in seamount closures, **SC recommends that the boundary proposed in 2020 for the Corner Rise Seamount area (SCS Doc. 20/14) be extended to the east to include the seven seamounts ranging in peak depth from 2747-3881 m**.

Seamounts north of Orphan Knoll: In order to apply a consistent approach across the remaining areas of the NAFO Convention Area in ABNJ, Scientific Council examined any seamounts with peak depth < 4000 m. All of the seamounts that met this criterion were north of Orphan Knoll. Seven seamounts shallower than 4000 m depth were identified by Kim and Wessel (2011) and/or by using the 2019 GEBCO bathymetry in the NAFO Divisions 1F, 2HJ, and 3K. **SC recommends the implementation of seven seamount closures in the NAFO Convention Area in ABNJ north of Orphan Knoll.**

The proposed revisions for all seamounts in the NRA supersede the 2020 SC advice on this topic, and are summarized in Figure v.26. Further details can be found in Figures v.27-v.35.

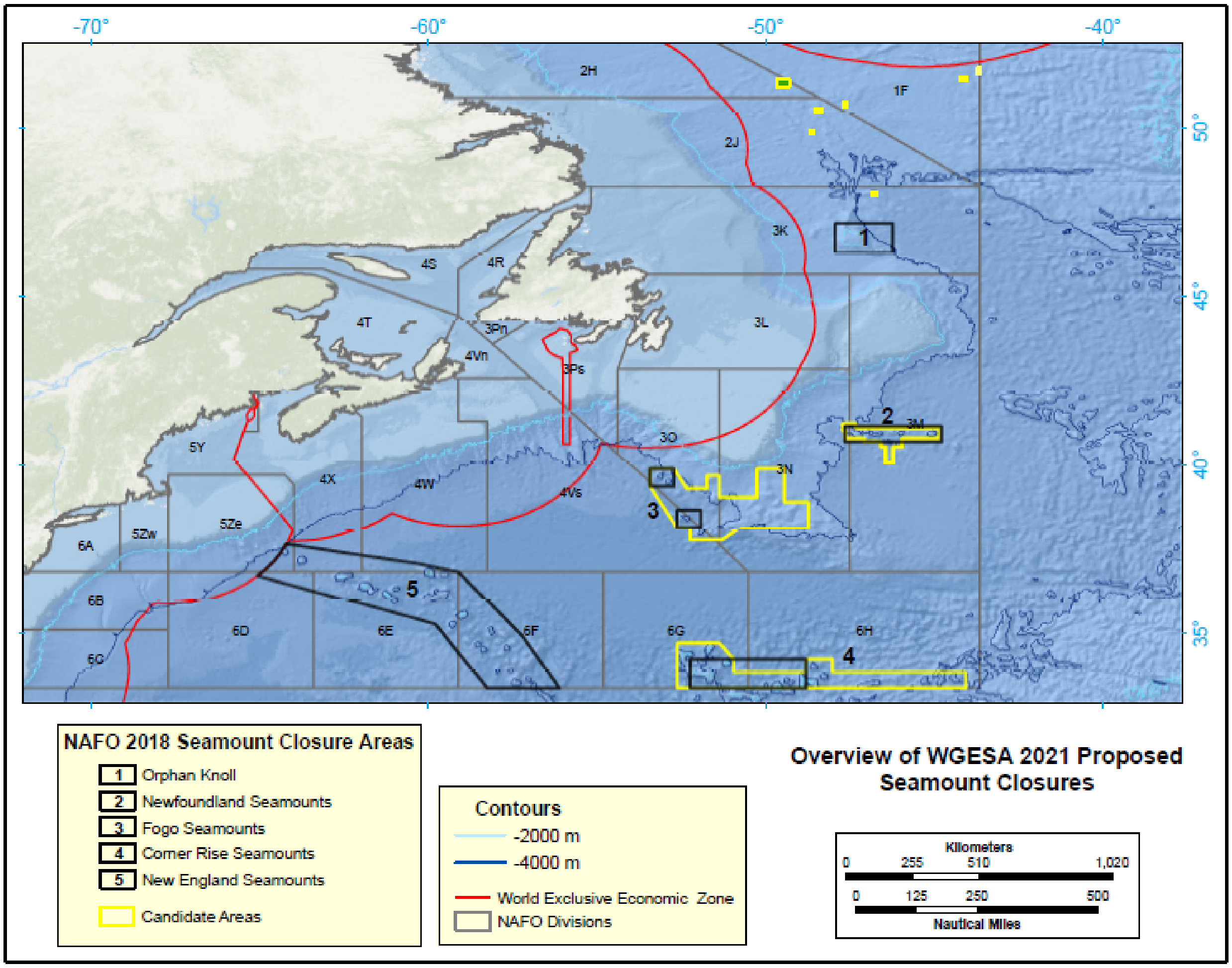
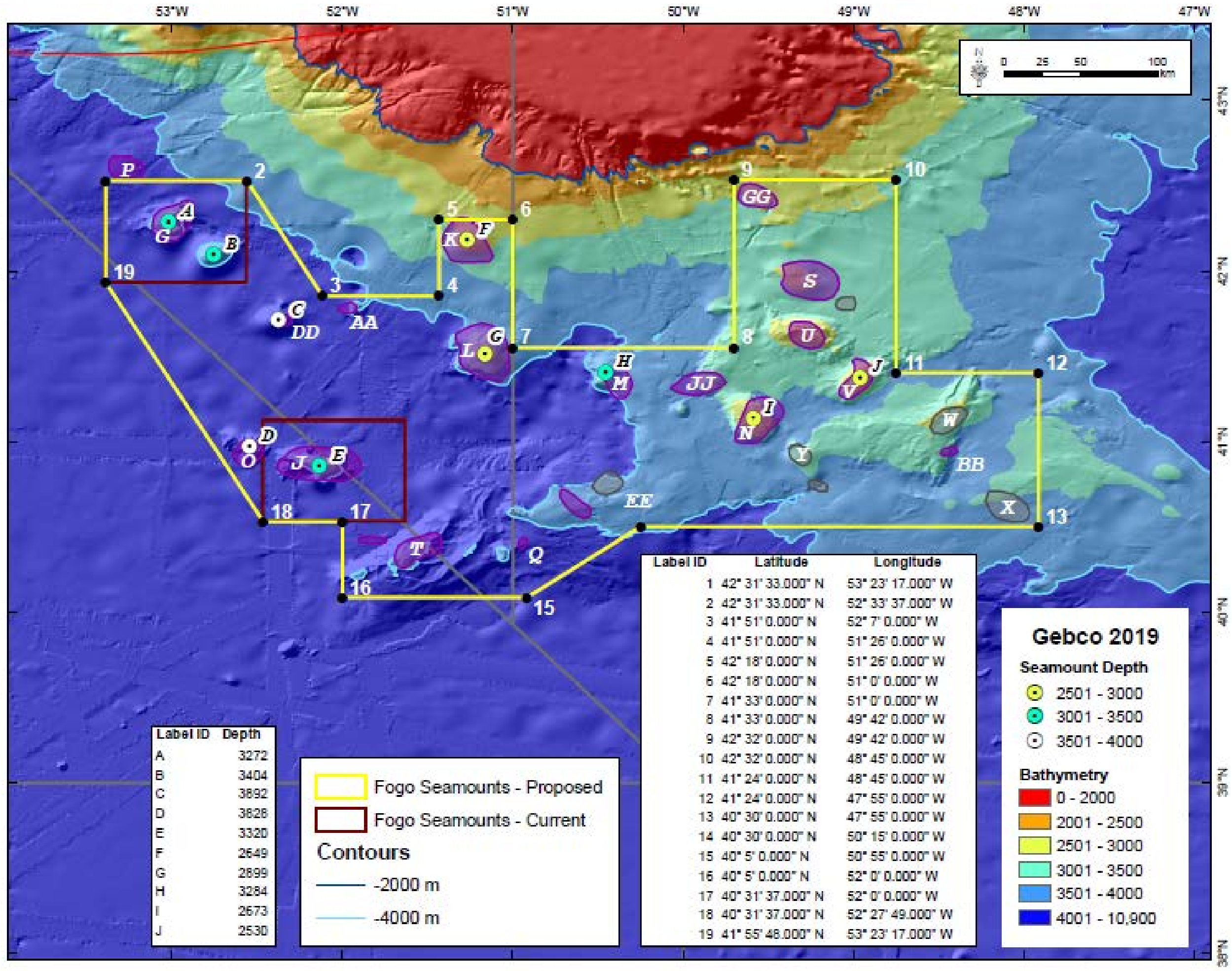


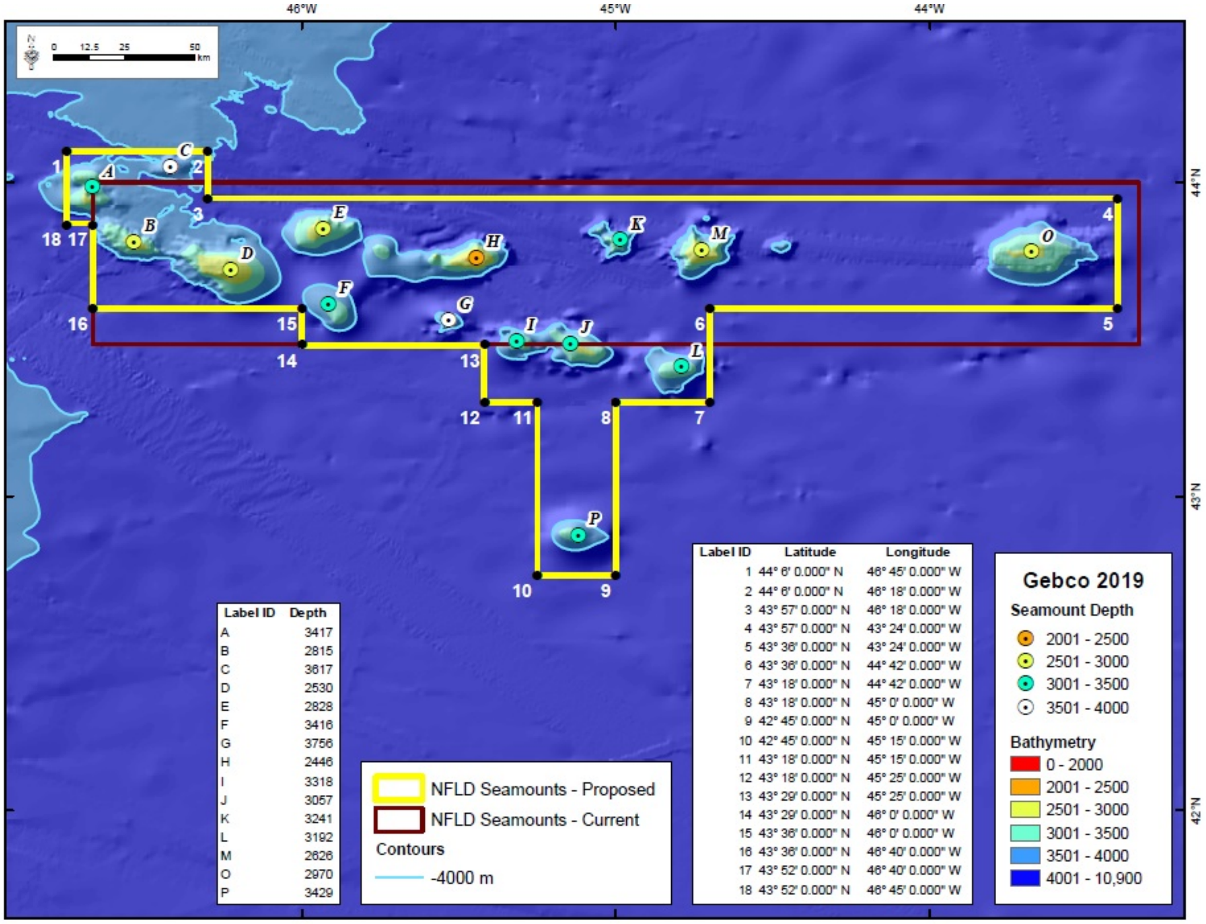
Figure v.26. Location of the seamount areas in the NRA with current closures indicated in black outline (SCS Doc. 20/14). Proposed changes and new closures are indicated by yellow lines.



Label ID	Depth
A	3272
B	3404
C	3892
D	3828
E	3320
F	2649
G	2899
H	3284
I	2673
J	2530

Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	42° 31' 33.000" N	53° 23' 17.000" W
2	42° 31' 33.000" N	52° 33' 37.000" W
3	41° 51' 0.000" N	52° 7' 0.000" W
4	41° 51' 0.000" N	51° 26' 0.000" W
5	42° 18' 0.000" N	51° 26' 0.000" W
6	42° 18' 0.000" N	51° 0' 0.000" W
7	41° 33' 0.000" N	51° 0' 0.000" W
8	41° 33' 0.000" N	49° 42' 0.000" W
9	42° 32' 0.000" N	49° 42' 0.000" W
10	42° 32' 0.000" N	48° 45' 0.000" W
11	41° 24' 0.000" N	48° 45' 0.000" W
12	41° 24' 0.000" N	47° 55' 0.000" W
13	40° 30' 0.000" N	47° 55' 0.000" W
14	40° 30' 0.000" N	50° 15' 0.000" W
15	40° 5' 0.000" N	50° 55' 0.000" W
16	40° 5' 0.000" N	52° 0' 0.000" W
17	40° 31' 37.000" N	52° 0' 0.000" W
18	40° 31' 37.000" N	52° 27' 49.000" W
19	41° 55' 48.000" N	53° 23' 17.000" W

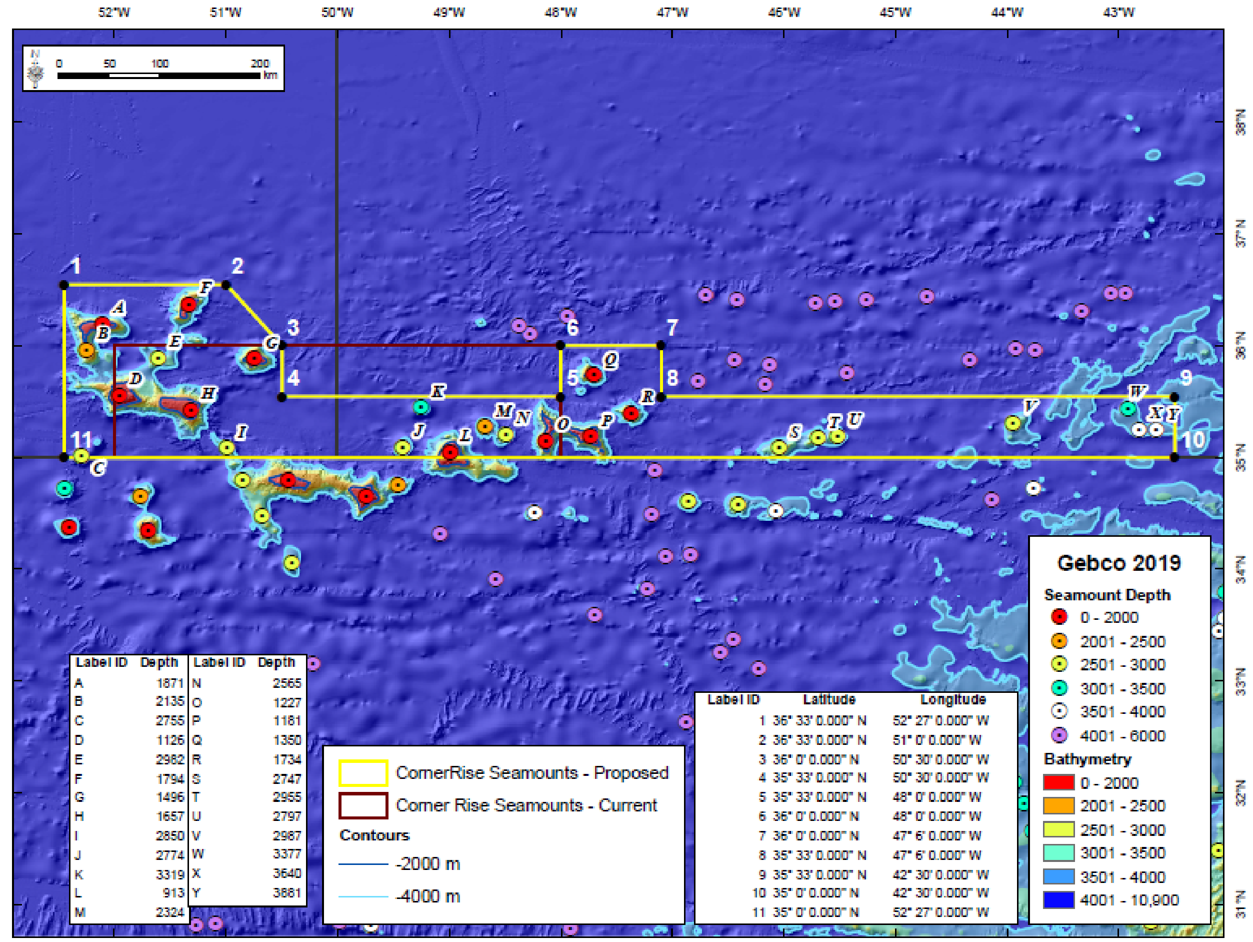
Figure v.27. Close up of the current closed area to protect VMEs on the Fogo Seamounts (red outline; Fogo Seamounts I and 2 - SCS Doc. 20/14), with proposed boundary changes to capture the unprotected seamounts in the chain (yellow outline). Circles (A – J indicate seamounts identified by Kim and Wessel (2011) and colour-coded by peak depth. Purple and grey polygons, and associated lettering, indicates seamounts and possible seamounts identified by Pe-Piper et al., (2007). Light blue lines represent the 4000 m depth contour, while the dark blue line indicates the 2000 m depth contour. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depths are listed in the legends.



Label ID	Depth
A	3417
B	2815
C	3617
D	2530
E	2828
F	3416
G	3756
H	2446
I	3318
J	3057
K	3241
L	3192
M	2626
O	2970
P	3429

Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	44° 6' 0.000" N	46° 45' 0.000" W
2	44° 6' 0.000" N	46° 18' 0.000" W
3	43° 57' 0.000" N	46° 18' 0.000" W
4	43° 57' 0.000" N	43° 24' 0.000" W
5	43° 36' 0.000" N	43° 24' 0.000" W
6	43° 36' 0.000" N	44° 42' 0.000" W
7	43° 18' 0.000" N	44° 42' 0.000" W
8	43° 18' 0.000" N	45° 0' 0.000" W
9	42° 45' 0.000" N	45° 0' 0.000" W
10	42° 45' 0.000" N	45° 15' 0.000" W
11	43° 18' 0.000" N	45° 15' 0.000" W
12	43° 18' 0.000" N	45° 25' 0.000" W
13	43° 29' 0.000" N	45° 25' 0.000" W
14	43° 29' 0.000" N	46° 0' 0.000" W
15	43° 36' 0.000" N	46° 0' 0.000" W
16	43° 36' 0.000" N	46° 40' 0.000" W
17	43° 52' 0.000" N	46° 40' 0.000" W
18	43° 52' 0.000" N	46° 45' 0.000" W

Figure v.28. Close up of the current closed area to protect VMEs on the Newfoundland Seamounts (red outline), with proposed boundary changes to capture the unprotected seamounts of similar peak depths in the seamount chain (yellow outline). Circles (A – P) indicate seamounts colour-coded by depth (source Kim and Wessel 2011). The light blue line represents the 4000 m depth contour. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depths are listed in the legends.



Label ID	Depth	Label ID	Depth
A	1871	N	2565
B	2135	O	1227
C	2755	P	1181
D	1126	Q	1350
E	2962	R	1734
F	1794	S	2747
G	1496	T	2955
H	1657	U	2797
I	2850	V	2987
J	2774	W	3377
K	3319	X	3640
L	913	Y	3881
M	2324		

Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	36° 33' 0.000" N	52° 27' 0.000" W
2	36° 33' 0.000" N	51° 0' 0.000" W
3	36° 0' 0.000" N	50° 30' 0.000" W
4	35° 33' 0.000" N	50° 30' 0.000" W
5	35° 33' 0.000" N	48° 0' 0.000" W
6	36° 0' 0.000" N	48° 0' 0.000" W
7	36° 0' 0.000" N	47° 6' 0.000" W
8	35° 33' 0.000" N	47° 6' 0.000" W
9	35° 33' 0.000" N	42° 30' 0.000" W
10	35° 0' 0.000" N	42° 30' 0.000" W
11	35° 0' 0.000" N	52° 27' 0.000" W

Figure v.29. Close up of the current closed area to protect VMEs on the Corner Rise Seamounts (red outline), with proposed boundary changes to capture the unprotected seamounts nearby shallower than 4000 m depth (yellow outline). The area outlined in yellow to the west of a vertical line extending south from point 8 was previously accepted by Scientific Council (SCS Doc. 20/14). Circles (A – Y) indicate seamounts (Kim and Wessel 2011) shallower than 4000 m depth. The light blue line represents the 4000 m depth contour. Coordinates for the new boundary and peak depths are listed in the legends. Note that the area south of 35N falls within the WECAFC area; those seamounts have been separately protected by that RFMO/A.

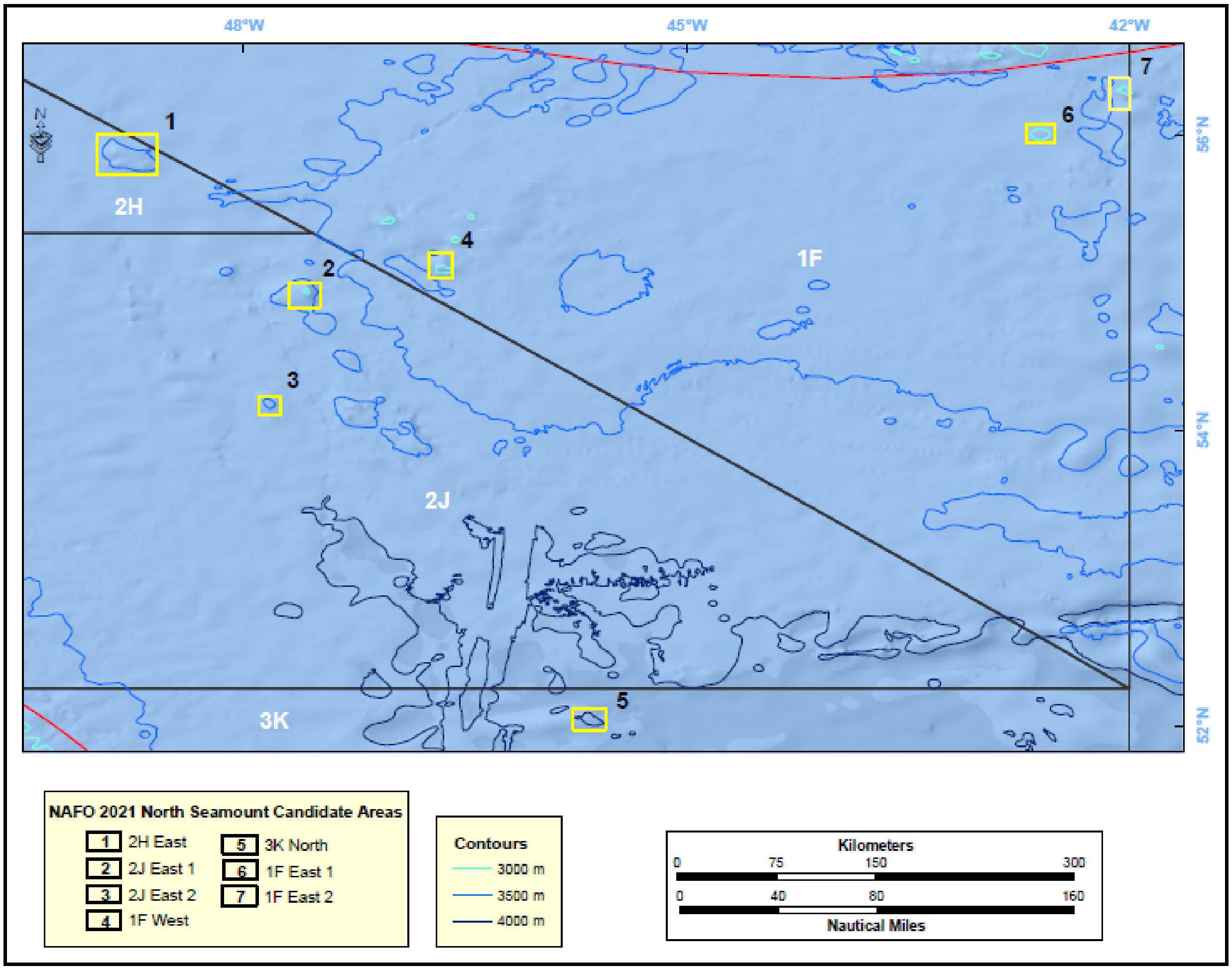
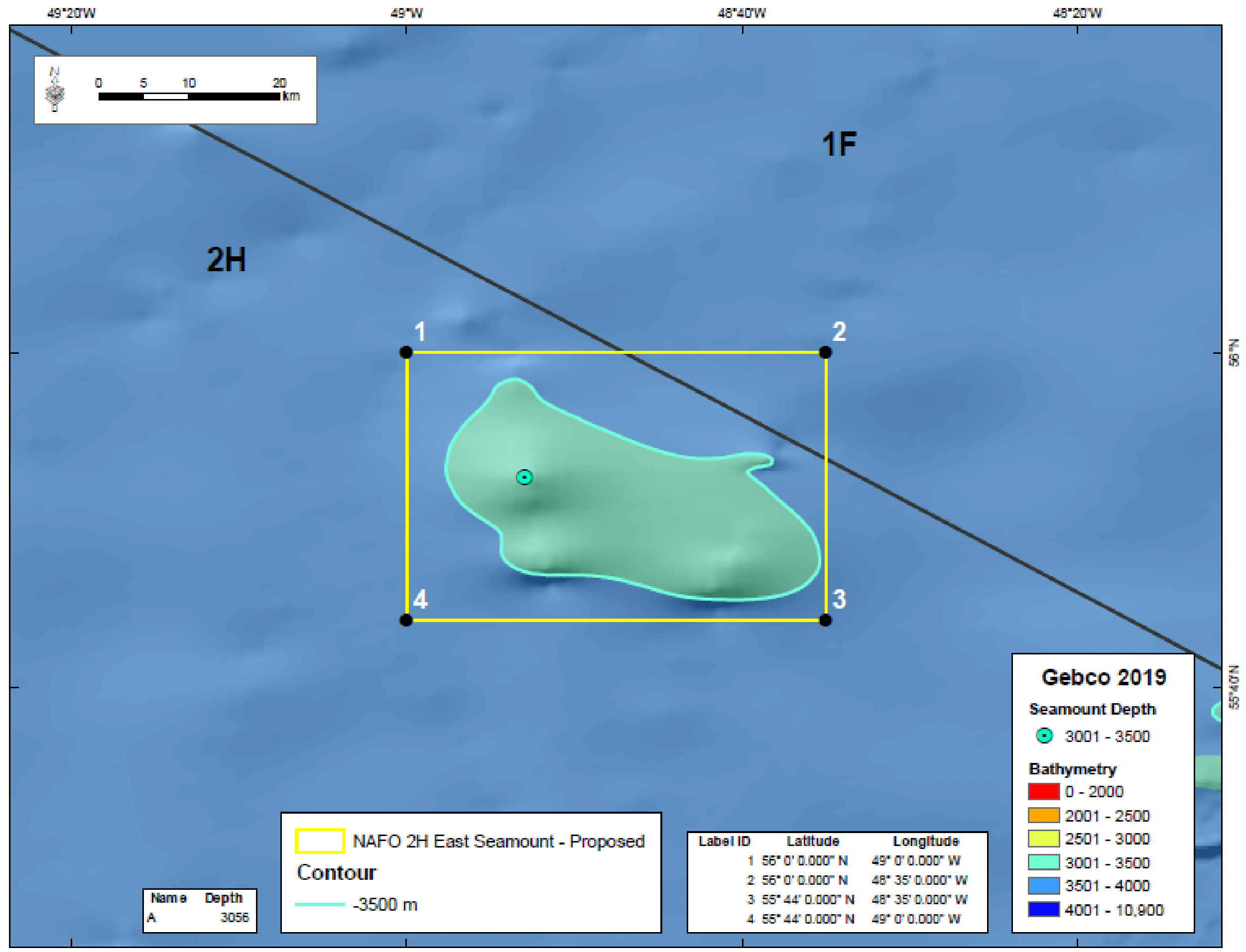
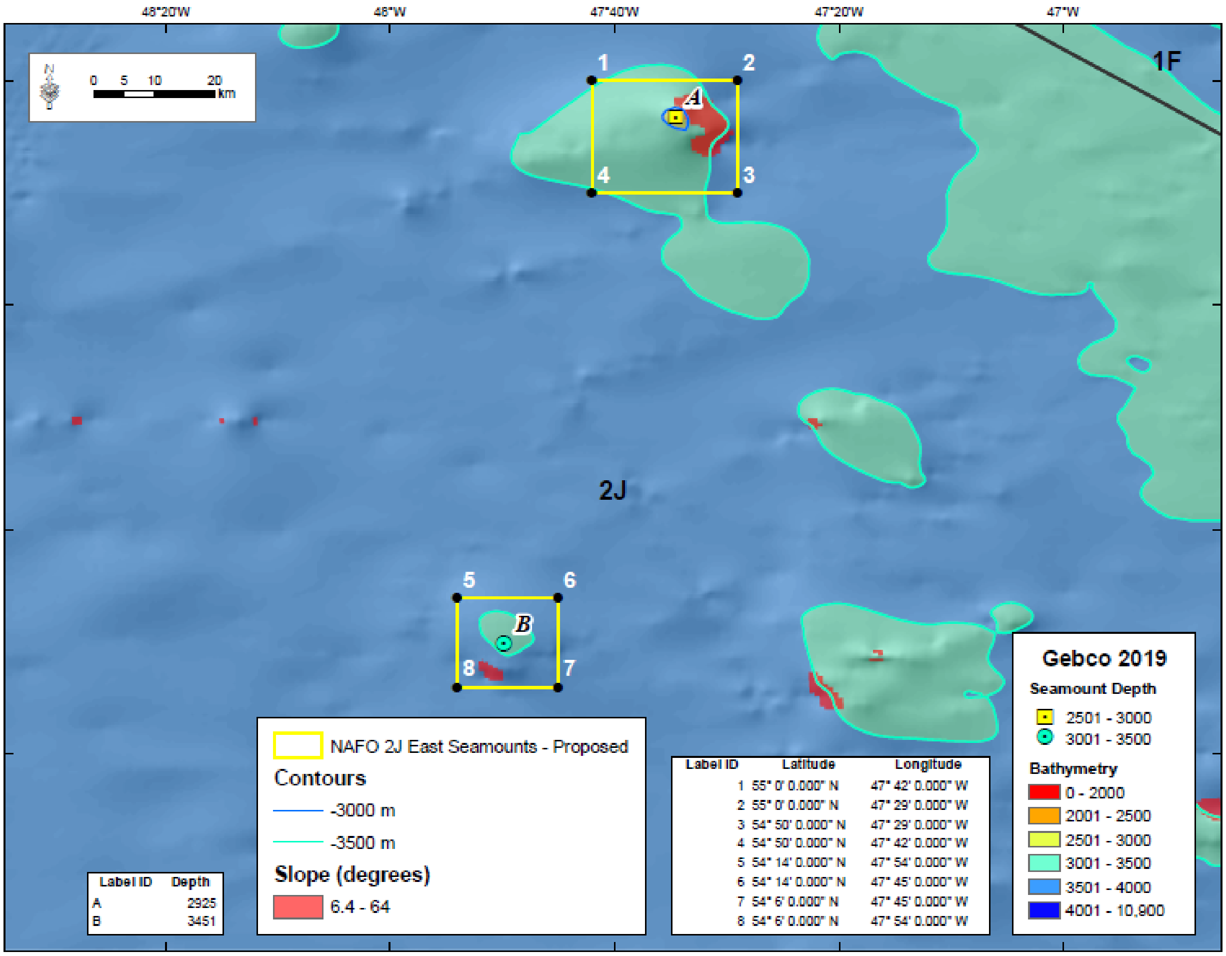


Figure v.30. Location of the proposed closures (yellow boxes) to protect the seven individual and tentative seamounts in NAFO Divisions 1F, 2HJ, and 3K. The EEZ of Greenland (north) and Canada (southwest) are outlined in red. Detailed maps are provided in Figures v.31 to v.35.



Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	56° 0' 0.000" N	49° 0' 0.000" W
2	56° 0' 0.000" N	48° 35' 0.000" W
3	55° 44' 0.000" N	48° 35' 0.000" W
4	55° 44' 0.000" N	49° 0' 0.000" W

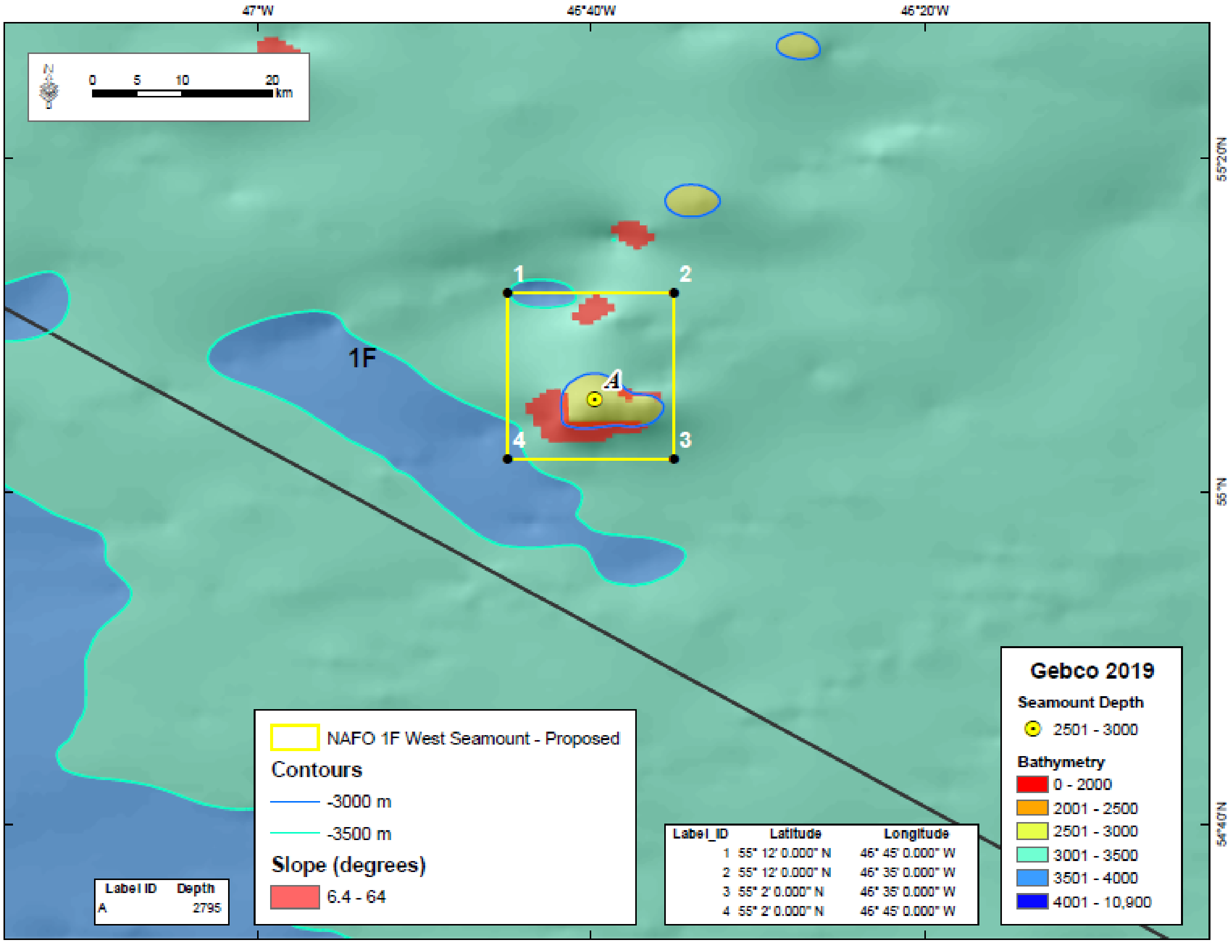
Figure v.31. Close up of Area 1 (2H East) from Figure X5. Proposed individual seamount closures to capture the unprotected seamounts shallower than 4000 m depth in NAFO Division 2H (source Kim and Wessel 2011) are shown. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depth are listed in the legends.



Label ID	Depth
A	2925
B	3451

Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	55° 0' 0.000" N	47° 42' 0.000" W
2	55° 0' 0.000" N	47° 29' 0.000" W
3	54° 50' 0.000" N	47° 29' 0.000" W
4	54° 50' 0.000" N	47° 42' 0.000" W
5	54° 14' 0.000" N	47° 54' 0.000" W
6	54° 14' 0.000" N	47° 45' 0.000" W
7	54° 6' 0.000" N	47° 45' 0.000" W
8	54° 6' 0.000" N	47° 54' 0.000" W

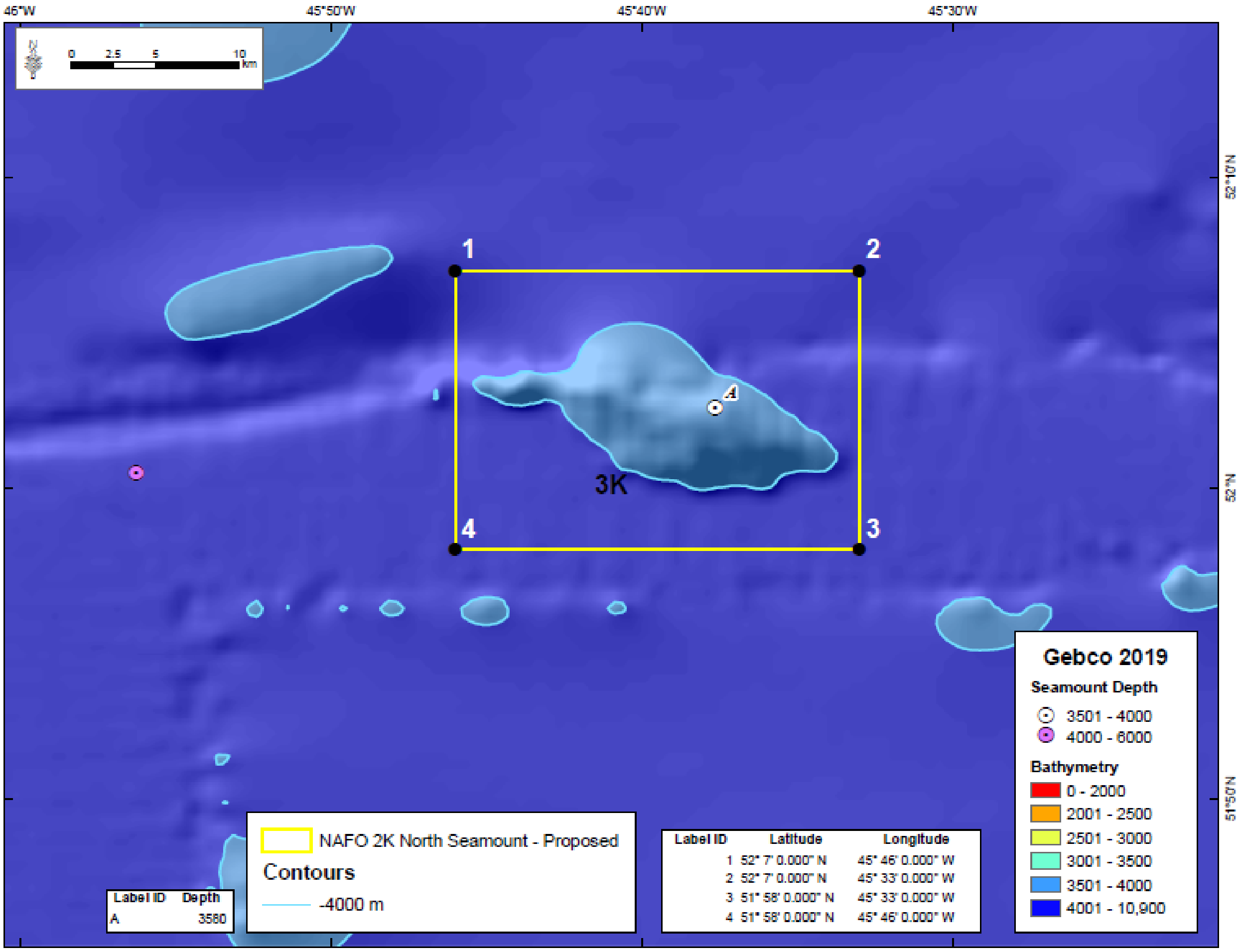
Figure v.32. Close up of Areas 2 (2J East 1) and 3 (2J East 2) from Figure X5. Proposed seamount closures to capture the unprotected seamounts shallower than 4000 m depth in the NAFO Division 2J. The Seamount A (yellow square) represents a tentative seamount based on the 2019 GEBCO. Seamount B (blue circle) was identified by Kim and Wessel (2011). Red areas highlight slopes greater than 6.4°. Depth contours for 3000 m and 3500 m are highlighted. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depth are listed in the legends.



Label ID	Depth
A	2795

Label_ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	55° 12' 0.000" N	46° 45' 0.000" W
2	55° 12' 0.000" N	46° 35' 0.000" W
3	55° 2' 0.000" N	46° 35' 0.000" W
4	55° 2' 0.000" N	46° 45' 0.000" W

Figure v.33. Close up of Area 4 (1F West) from Figure X5. Proposed seamount closures to capture the unprotected seamount shallower than 4000 m depth in the NAFO Division 1F. Seamount A (yellow circle) represents a tentative seamount based on the 2019 GEBCO. Red areas highlight slope greater than 6.4°. Depth contours for 3000 and 3500 m are highlighted. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depth are listed in the legends.



Label ID	Depth
A	3560

Label ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	52° 7' 0.000" N	45° 46' 0.000" W
2	52° 7' 0.000" N	45° 33' 0.000" W
3	51° 58' 0.000" N	45° 33' 0.000" W
4	51° 58' 0.000" N	45° 46' 0.000" W

Figure v.34. Close up of Area 5 (3K North) from Figure X5. Proposed individual seamount closures to capture the unprotected seamounts shallower than 4000 m depth in the NAFO Division 3K (source Kim and Wessel 2011) are shown. Depth contours for 4000 m are highlighted. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depth are listed in the legends.

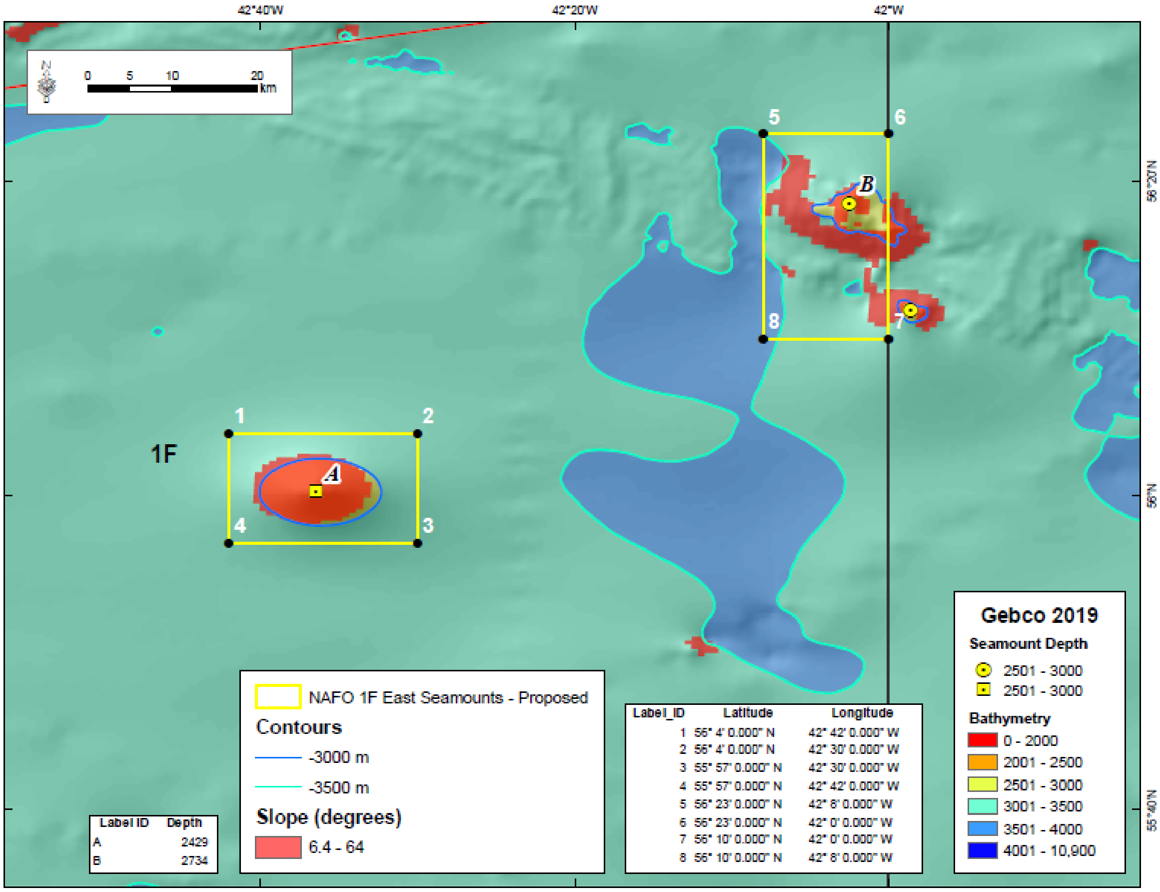


Figure v.35. Close up of Areas 6 (1F East 1) and 7 (1F East 2) from Figure X5. Proposed seamount closures to capture the unprotected seamount shallower than 4000 m depth in NAFO Division 1F. Seamount A (yellow square) represents a tentative seamount based on the slope estimated from the 2019 GEBCO dataset. Seamount B (yellow circle) was identified by Kim and Wessel (2011). Red areas highlight slope greater than 6.4°. Depth contours for 3000 and 3500 m are highlighted. Coordinates for the new boundary and feature depths are listed in the legends.

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Kim, S.-S., and Wessel, P. 2011. New global seamount census from the altimetry-derived gravity data, Geophys. J. Int. 186: 615-631.

Kulka, D., Templeman, N., Janes, J., Power, A., and Brodie, W. 2007. Information on seamounts in the NAFO Convention Area. NAFO SCR Doc. 07/61, Serial No. N5414.

Lapointe, A.E., Watling, L., France, S.C., and Auster, P. 2020. Megabenthic assemblages in the lower bathyal (700-3000 m) on the new England and Corner Rise Seamounts, Northwest Atlantic. Deep-Sea Res. I, 165:

Pe-Piper, G., Piper, D.J.W., Jansa, L.F., and De Jonge, A. 2007. Early Cretaceous opening of the North Atlantic Ocean: Implications of the petrology and tectonic setting of the Fogo Seamounts off the SW Grand Banks, Newfoundland. Geological Society of America Bulletin, 119: 712-724.

Ríos, P., Cristobo, J., Baker, E., Beazley, L., Culwick, T., and Kenchington, E. 2021. Increasing knowledge of biodiversity on the Orphan Seamount: a new species of *Tedania* (*Tedaniopsis*) Dendy, 1924. Front. Mar. Sci., 16. https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.612857

Yesson, C., Clark, M.R., Taylor, M.L., and Rogers, A.D. 2011. The global distribution of seamounts based on 30 arc seconds bathymetry data. Deep. Res. Part I. 58: 442–453.

vi) Request #7: Review the proposed revisions to Annex I.E, Part VI

The Commission requests that Scientific Council review the proposed revisions to Annex I.E, Part VI as reflected in COM/SC WG–EAFFM WP 18-01, for consistency with the taxa list annexed to the VME guide and recommend updates as necessary.

Scientific Council responded:

SC recommends the following changes to Annex I.E, Part VI to reflect current correct taxonomic nomenclature, to correct spelling errors in previous versions and add three letter ASFIS codes where they are available.

Revisions are highlighted in grey and footnotes provide a description of the revisions.

VI. List of VME Indicator Species

Common Name and FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE	Taxon	Family	FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE
Large-Sized Sponges (PFR - Porifera)	*Asconema foliatum*	Rossellidae	ZBA
	Aphrocallistes beatrix	Aphrocallistidae	
	Asbestopluma (Asbestopluma) ruetzleri	Cladorhizidae	ZAB (Asbestopluma)
	Axinella sp.	Axinellidae	
	Chondrocladia grandis	Cladorhizidae	ZHD (Chondrocladia)
	Cladorhiza abyssicola	Cladorhizidae	ZCH (Cladorhiza)
	Cladorhiza kenchingtonae	Cladorhizidae	ZCH (Cladorhiza)
	Craniella spp.	Tetillidae	ZCS (Craniella spp.)
	Dictyaulus romani	Euplectellidae	ZDY (Dictyaulus)
	Esperiopsis villosa	Esperiopsidae	ZEW
	Forcepia spp.	Coelosphaeridae	ZFR
	Geodia barretti[13]	Geodiidae	
	Geodia macandrewii	Geodiidae	
	Geodia parva	Geodiidae	
	Geodia phlegraei	Geodiidae	
	Haliclona sp.	Chalinidae	ZHL
	Iophon piceum	Acarnidae	WJP
	Isodictya palmata	Isodictyidae	
	Lissodendoryx (Lissodendoryx) complicata	Coelosphaeridae	ZDD

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[13] Spelling correction

Common Name and FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE	**Taxon**	**Family**	**FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE**
	Mycale (Mycale) lingua	Mycalidae	YHL (Mycale lingua)[14]
	Mycale (Mycale) loveni	Mycalidae	
	Phakellia sp.	Axinellidae	
	Polymastia spp.	Polymastiidae	ZPY
	Stelletta normani	Ancorinidae	WSX (Stelletta)
	Stelletta tuberosa	Ancorinidae	WSX (Stelletta)
	Stryphnus fortis	Ancorinidae	WPH
	Thenea muricata	Pachastrellidae	ZTH (Thenea)
	Thenea valdiviae	Pachastrellidae	ZTH (Thenea)
	Weberella bursa	Polymastiidae	ZWB (Weberella spp.)[15]
Stony Corals (CSS - Scleractinia)	*Enallopsammia rostrata**	Dendrophylliidae	FEY
	*Lophelia pertusa**	Caryophylliidae	LWS
	*Madrepora oculata**	Oculinidae	MVI
	*Solenosmilia variabilis**	Caryophylliidae	RZT
Black corals (AQZ-Antipatharia)	*Stichopathes* sp.	Antipathidae	QYX
	Leiopathes cf. *expansa*	Leiopathidae	
	Leiopathes sp.	Leiopathidae	
	Plumapathes sp.	Myriopathidae	
	Bathypathes cf. *patula*	Schizopathidae	
	Parantipathes sp.	Schizopathidae	
	Stauropathes arctica	Schizopathidae	SQW
	Stauropathes cf. *punctata*	Schizopathidae	
	Telopathes magnus	Schizopathidae	
Small Gorgonians (GGW)	*Acanella arbuscula*	Isididae	KQL (Acanella)
	Anthothela grandiflora	Anthothelidae	WAG
	Chrysogorgia sp.	Chrysogorgiidae	FHX

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[14] Code in 2020 ASFIS list. The ASFIS list of species is compiled by FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics and Information Branch.

[15] Code in 2020 ASFIS list.

Common Name and FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE	Taxon	Family	FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE
	*Metallogorgia melanotrichos**	Chrysogorgiidae	QFY (Chrysogorgiidae)[16]
	Narella laxa	Primnoidae	QON (Primnoidae)[17]
	Radicipes gracilis	Chrysogorgiidae	CZN
	Swiftia sp.	Plexauridae	
Large Gorgonians (GGW)	*Acanthogorgia armata*	Acanthogorgiidae	AZC
	Calyptrophora sp.*	Primnoidae	QON (Primnoidae)[18]
	Hemicorallium bathyrubrum[19]	Coralliidae	COR (Corallium)
	Hemicorallium bayeri[20]	Coralliidae	COR (Corallium)
	Iridogorgia sp.*	Chrysogorgiidae	QFY (Chrysogorgiidae) [21]
	Keratoisis cf. *siemensii*	Isididae	IQO (Isididae)[22]
	Keratoisis grayi	Isididae	IQO (Isididae) [23]
	Lepidisis sp.*	Isididae	QFX (Lepidisis)
	Paragorgia arborea	Paragorgiidae	BFU
	Paragorgia johnsoni	Paragorgiidae	BFV
	Paramuricea grandis	Plexauridae	PZL (Paramuricea)
	Paramuricea placomus	Plexauridae	PZL (Paramuricea)
	Paramuricea spp.	Plexauridae	PZL (Paramuricea)
	Parastenella atlantica	Primnoidae	QON (Primnoidae)[24]
	Placogorgia sp.	Plexauridae	
	Placogorgia terceira	Plexauridae	

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[16] Code in 2020 ASFIS list.

[17] Code in 2020 ASFIS list.

[18] Code in 2020 ASFIS list.

[19] Name changed in taxonomic revision

[20] Name changed in taxonomic revision

[21] Code in the 2020 ASFIS list.

[22] Code in the 2020 ASFIS list.

[23] Code in the 2020 ASFIS list.

[24] Code in the 2020 ASFIS list.

Common Name and FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE	**Taxon**	**Family**	**FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE**
	Primnoa resedaeformis	Primnoidae	QOE
	*Thouarella (Euthouarella) grasshoffi**	Primnoidae	QON (Primnoidae)[25]
Sea Pens (NTW – Pennatulacea)	*Anthoptilum grandiflorum*	Anthoptilidae	AJG (Anthoptilum)
	Distichoptilum gracile	Protoptilidae	WDG
	Funiculina quadrangularis	Funiculinidae	FQJ
	Halipteris cf. *christii*	Halipteridae	ZHX (Halipteris)
	Halipteris finmarchica	Halipteridae	HFM
	Halipteris sp.	Halipteridae	ZHX (Halipteris)
	Kophobelemnon stelliferum	Kophobelemnidae	KVF
	Pennatula aculeata	Pennatulidae	QAC
	Ptilella spp.[26]	Pennatulidae	
	Pennatula sp.	Pennatulidae	
	Protoptilum carpenteri	Protoptilidae	
	Umbellula lindahli	Umbellulidae	OJZ (Ombellula spp)[27]
	Virgularia mirabilis	Virgulariidae	
Tube-Dwelling Anemones	*Pachycerianthus borealis*	Cerianthidae	WQB
Erect Bryozoans (BZN – Bryozoa)	*Eucratea loricata*	Eucrateidae	WEL
Sea Lilies (CWD – Crinoidea)	*Conocrinus lofotensis*	Bourgueticrinidae	WCF
	Gephyrocrinus grimaldii	Hyocrinidae	
	Trichometra cubensis	Antedonidae	
	Boltenia ovifera	Pyuridae	WBO

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[25] Code in the 2020 ASFIS list.

[26] Name change in taxonomic revision

[27] Listed in the 2020 ASFIS code list as Ombellula which is a spelling variant. Umbellula is correct but they are the same genus (synonyms)

Common Name and FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE	Taxon	Family	FAO ASFIS 3-ALPHA CODE
Sea Squirts (SSX – Ascidiacea)	*Halocynthia aurantium*	Pyuridae	
Unlikely to be observed in trawls; *in situ* observations only:			
Large xenophyophores	*Syringammina* sp.	Syringamminidae	

vii) Request #8: Continue progress on the NAFO PA Framework review

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue progression on the review of the NAFO PA Framework in accordance to the PAF review work plan approved in 2020 (NAFO COM-SC Doc. 20-04)

Scientific Council responded:

SC reported on progress made on addressing the mapping of objectives deliverable (ToR 1a, c, and g of the PA-WG), to consider how the objectives and general principles of the NAFO Convention can be represented in the Precautionary Approach Framework. Many of the objectives and general principles of the NAFO convention can be represented in the Precautionary Approach Framework. The PA-WG recommends that the PA framework should: 1) promote rebuilding of stocks toward the stock biomass associated with maximum sustainable yield (B_{msy}), 2) account for uncertainty through buffer reference points or other risk-based approaches, 3) develop limit reference points for stock biomass (B_{lim}) and fishing mortality (F_{lim}) that are consistent with each other, 4) base B_{lim} on sustainability and reduced productive capacity where possible. To the extent possible, all options considered for a revised PA framework should be performance tested by simulation with respect to whether management measures set in accordance with the framework could achieve the following objectives: a very low risk of stock reduction below B_{lim}, rebuild stocks to around B_{msy}, maintain stocks above B_{msy} more often than not, and maintain average catches of approximately MSY in the long-term.

Depending on further progress of the PA-WG, it is possible that SC may have a one-day meeting on August 17, 2021 to further expand on this response.

The Precautionary Approach Working Group (PA-WG) continued progress in the steps needed to review the NAFO PA Framework. The group started work on the Mapping Objectives deliverable laid out by SC/RBMS in 2020, starting with the addition of three external experts to work with the PA-WG. This objective focused on Terms of Reference (SCS 16/15) 1 a, c, and g, where conceptual questions are presented and address how the framework will represent many of the basic NAFO Convention objectives (NAFO 2017). This deliverable will be provided to WG-RBMS for feedback from managers in August at their meeting.

SC reviewed the Working Paper presented by the PA-WG, and progress was made on the following points, which were provided to external experts to guide their review:

a. *Compile information on the use of MSY in the PA frameworks reviewed by SC WG-PAF, as well as other relevant sources (e.g., FAO, other jurisdictions) and summarize these findings identifying the pros and cons of the two conceptual roles (i.e., as a limit or a target) of MSY. The possibility of applying a "weight of evidence" approach (Tao* et al. *2018), to tabulate the arguments for and against alternative options, should be considered.*

b. *Examine how different PA frameworks address (or not) changes in stock and/or ecosystem productivity over time, focused on long term changes and different productivity regimes, and summarize these findings identifying the pros and cons of the various approaches.*

c. *Based on the results from the examination above, consider the definitions used in the existing NAFO PAF, highlight potential contradictions or inconsistencies, and propose alternative definitions that could address them.*

d. *Other relevant matters that may be identified in the process of conducting this work.*

NAFO Secretariat hired three external experts to contribute to the revision of the PA-WG: Dr. Steve Cadrin (University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, USA), Dr Jan Horbowy (National Marine Fisheries Resources Institute, Gdynia, Poland) and Dr. Daniel Howell (Institute Marine Resources, Bergen, Norway). These scientists were selected based on discussions between the PA-WG and the co-chairs of WG-RBMS and approved by SC. The PA-WG met by WebEx meetings (26 February 2021, 8 April 2021, and 14 May 2021) to review the terms of reference and workplan, consider external review of the 'Discussion Paper on the NAFO Precautionary Approach Framework' (NAFO SC Working Paper 20/010), and a subgroup drafted a report on how the objectives and general principles of the NAFO Convention can be represented in the Precautionary Approach Framework. The PA-WG reached consensus on most aspects of the mapping deliverable, which are reported as preliminary findings. Many of the objectives and general principles of the NAFO convention can be represented in the Precautionary Approach Framework, together with other NAFO processes to minimize bycatch, catch by lost/abandoned gear, pollution and waste from fishing, safeguard the marine environment, conserve its marine biodiversity, minimize the risk of long term or irreversible adverse effects of fishing activities, and take account of the relationship between all components of the ecosystem. The PA-WG recommends that the PA framework should: 1) promote rebuilding of stocks toward the stock biomass associated with maximum sustainable yield (B_{msy}), 2) account for uncertainty through buffer reference points or other risk-based approaches, 3) develop limit reference points for stock biomass (B_{lim}) and fishing mortality (F_{lim}) that are consistent with each other, 4) base B_{lim} on sustainability and reduced productive capacity where possible. To the extent possible, all options considered for a revised PA framework should be performance tested by simulation with respect to whether management measures set in accordance with the framework could achieve the following objectives: a very low risk of stock reduction below B_{lim}, rebuild stocks to around $B_{msy,}$ maintain stocks above B_{msy} more often than not, and maintain average catches of approximately MSY in the long-term.

It was noted that work should continue on ToR 1g (Examine how different PA frameworks address (or not) changes in stock/ecosystem productivity over time, focused on long term changes/productivity regimes, and summarize these findings, including identifying the pros and cons of the different approaches) and the current plan is to finalize this ToR before the WG-RBMS meeting in August 2021.

viii) Request #9: bycatch and discards of Greenland sharks

The Commission requests that the Scientific Council work with WG-BDS to identify areas and times where bycatch and discards of Greenland sharks have a higher rate of occurrence in time for consideration by the Commission in 2021 to inform the development of measures to reduce bycatch in the NRA.

Scientific Council responded:

Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*) are caught as bycatch in fisheries throughout the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization Convention Area (NCA). The highest levels are outside the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA) in the Canadian and Greenland EEZs. Within the NRA, the slopes of the Flemish Cap and the shelf edge of Divs. 3LNO are areas of predicted Greenland shark bycatch. A higher occurrence of Greenland shark bycatch relative to the fishing effort was found during December to March, and August to September, for the Canadian fishery within the NRA.

Greenland shark bycatch within the NCA were analyzed using a variety of models. Given that not all fisheries have At-Sea Observers (ASOs) and that logbooks provide less precise data that are prone to bias, it is difficult to make definitive conclusions on the times/location of areas with higher rates of bycatch, which consequently affects inferences about the suitability of spatial or temporal fishing closures. SC reiterates that alternative management methods should also be considered (SCS Doc. 18/19). SC notes that management measures applied should be consistent across the NCA owing to the broad distribution of Greenland sharks.

SC reiterates its recommendation for reporting of all shark bycatch by species from all fisheries within the NCA as outlined in the current NCEM, and recommends including the collection of shark numbers, sex, measurements (when feasible without causing undue harm), and bycatch discard disposition (i.e., dead or alive) in all fisheries.

Background:

In 2018 NAFO SC responded to a request by the NAFO Commission to review available information on Greenland shark life history, distribution and bycatch in surveys and fisheries. Greenland shark were found to be present as bycatch in fisheries throughout the NAFO Convention Area, with higher levels of occurrence in deeper waters of 2GHJ3KL and in northern Subareas 0 and 1, compared to the NRA (Figure viii.1). NAFO commission subsequently requested the SC to identify areas and times where bycatch and discards of Greenland sharks have a higher rate of occurrence in NRA.

Greenland shark is a widely distributed species across the Arctic and cold temperature waters of the North Atlantic, it occurs not only within the NRA but also extends into both the Canadian and Greenlandic EEZs. Therefore, SC has recommended that all relevant information on this stock be reviewed when considering management decisions within the NRA. Below are summaries of three presentations provided to NAFO SC during the June 2021 meeting.

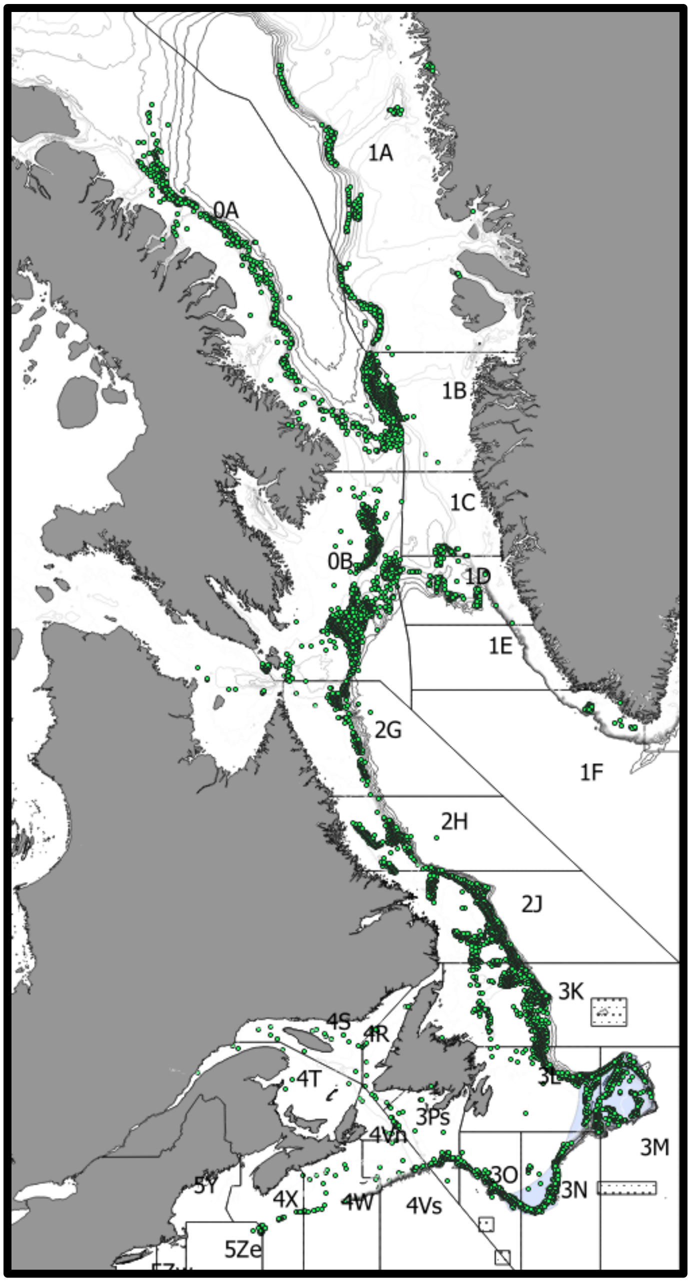

Figure viii.1. Overall distribution map of Greenland shark bycatch (Simpson et al. NAFO SCR 21/028).

Spatial-temporal variation in Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*) bycatch in the NAFO Regulatory Area (Simpson et al. NAFO SCR 21/28).

A MaxEnt model was applied to investigate the spatial distribution of Greenland shark bycatch in NAFO Divisions 2GHJ3KLMNO and Subarea 3Ps, to gain insight into areas where bycatch occurs, and expand upon the point pattern distributions previously provided to SC (e.g., Simpson et al 2018). Data were from Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) (1983–2019), Spain (1999–2017), and the NAFO Secretariat (2014–2019). Three environmental variables were included in the final model: bathymetry and monthly mean bottom temperature for March and November.

Overall, Greenland shark bycatch is greatest in the deeper waters of NAFO Subareas 2 and 3 (Figure viii.2). There are areas of modelled Greenland shark bycatch distribution in the NRA, along the slopes of the Flemish Cap, and the shelf edge in Divs. 3LNO.

The frequency of occurrence of observed Greenland shark bycatch compared to frequency of occurrence of all fishing effort for the Canadian fishery within the NRA suggests there is higher occurrence of Greenland shark bycatch relative to the fishing effort during December to March, and August to September.

While the results of this analysis suggest spatial or temporal fishing closures might be considered by managers, it is important to keep in mind that the model indicates where and when the bycatch of Greenland shark was highest for only those fisheries that had an at-sea observer collect data. Management measures that are not linked to space or time considerations that could be considered to provide increased protection to Greenland sharks include: a) live release and care in handling; b) gear modifications; c) shark bycatch limits; or d) reductions in fishing effort.

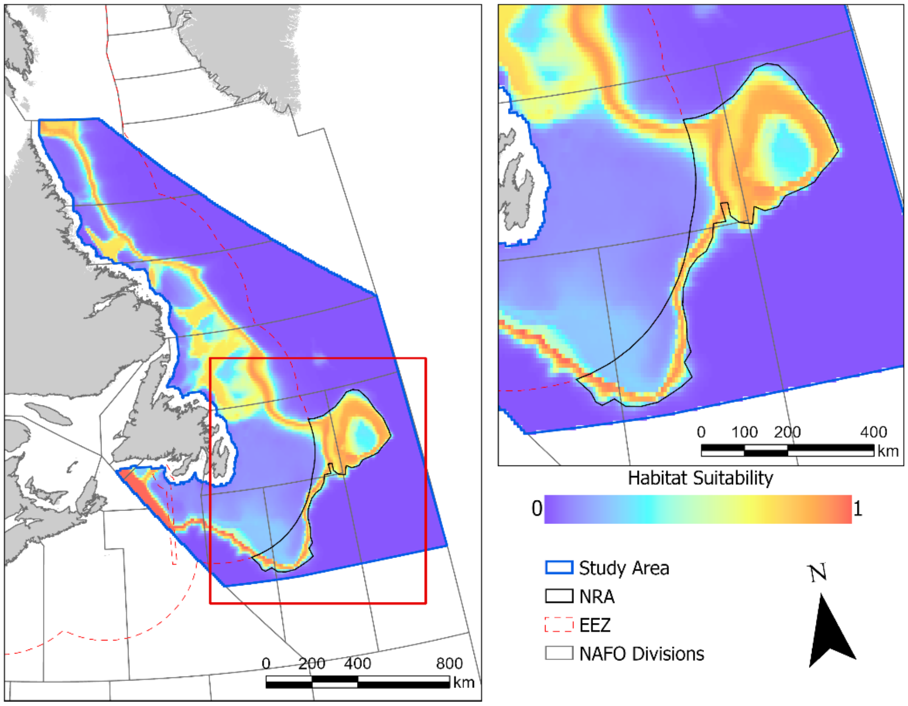

Figure viii.2. Bycatch model for Greenland shark.

Spatiotemporal Modelling of Bycatch Data: Methods and a Practical Guide through a Case Study in a Canadian Arctic Fishery (Yan et al. 2021, CJFAS in press).

A two-part spatial model was used to examine bycatch occurrence probability and positive bycatch weight of Greenland shark in Subarea 0 (Yan et al., 2021). Areas of higher bycatch occurrence were identified along the Baffin Island coast, consistent with observations in inshore areas (Cosandey-Godin et al., 2015) and Devine et al., 2018). While encounter probability was higher in the coastal area (Div. 0A), the weight of bycatch or biomass was higher in Northern Davis Strait (Div. 0B), suggesting sharks caught in the Davis Strait fishing grounds are larger than those caught on the grounds along the Baffin coast. This observation concurs with reports of juvenile Greenland sharks in Northern Baffin Bay fjords (Hussey et al., 2014). Month, gear and data source (ASO vs non-ASO) had a significant effect on the model. They indicate that management measures such as limiting the use of twin trawls and ensuring robust data is collected by continuing to deploy ASOs on fishing vessels may be important. Results indicate that bycatch is higher in winter months compared to summer months, suggesting a seasonal closure could be considered.

Greenland shark bycatch in NAFO Subareas 0+1 (Hedges et al. SCR 21/033)

Analysis of the number and total weight of Greenland shark caught as bycatch and mean fishing depth, ordinal date, year and NAFO Division based on records of bycatch were compiled from Canadian at-sea observers (ASO) assigned to offshore fleets in Subarea 0 (1980-2020), German ASO data in Subarea 1 (2000-2020) and Greenland logbooks in Subarea 1 offshore as well as Div. 1A inshore fisheries (2000-2020) was conducted using generalized linear models. The number and total weight of Greenland shark caught per fishing set was higher at depths of 950 to 1200 m, and 950 to 1400m, respectively. This suggest that higher weights reported at depths of 1200-1400 m are due to catches of larger bodied sharks. Higher numbers were caught during July to September, and higher total weights were reported during November and December, however this was not corrected for fishing effort. The number and total weight of Greenland shark caught per fishing set was higher in Subarea 0, but this pattern was likely affected by limitations in the data from Subarea 1. It is important to note that several countries are fishing in the Greenland EEZ but only Greenland and Germany have reported Greenland shark bycatch.

Results suggest that concentrated areas with high bycatch exist in northern Baffin Bay while areas with high bycatch are more dispersed in southern Baffin Bay and Davis Strait. The locations in Baffin Bay with higher and more concentrated bycatch amounts are near the northern extent of the data that could be an artefact of sampling bias.

Future analyses will benefit from improvements in the consistency of data collection regarding Greenland shark bycatch.

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ix) Request #10: Continue to develop a 3-5 year work plan

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue to develop a 3-5 year work plan, which reflects requests arising from the 2020 Annual Meeting, other multi-year stock assessments and other scientific inquiries already planned for the near future. The work plan should identify what resources are necessary to successfully address these issues, gaps in current resources to meet those needs and proposed prioritization by the Scientific Council of upcoming work based on those gaps.

Scientific Council responded:

SC updated the 5-year work plan including identification of priorities and required resources, noting this is an iterative discussion between the Commission and SC .

The 5-year plan allows for a high-level view of activities planned for the next five years, with more detailed annual plans for each year in which resource gaps and priorities are addressed.

The plan includes requests from the Commission, including stock assessments, other scientific inquiries (e.g. from specific contracting parties for straddling stocks) and SC work and advice of its own accord.

SC updates and reviews the plan each June and September to include all requests with prioritization and rationale where appropriate as well as the resources required to respond to the requests.

The SC notes that in the next two to three years the revision of two Management Strategies (redfish Div. 3LN and Greenland halibut Sub 2 Div. 3KLMNO) and the PAF revision coincide in time and, given the complexity and the high level of SC resources/capacity required to complete these tasks, SC strongly recommends against attempting to perform all three concurrently. Given the review of the PAF is well underway with dedicated external experts participating, SC recommends that the Commission prioritize one of the MSEs to commence first. SC expects the Greenland halibut MSE process to take at least two years to complete and the redfish MSE process to take at least three years. Consequently, the commencement of one of these MSE processes will need to be postponed and SC expects options will be discussed with RBMS in the August 2021 meeting. In that context, SC and WG-RBMS can also discuss how to proceed to produce management advice for the affected stock in the interim.

The special requests from Commission, as well as the work required by SC to support ongoing requests more generally (e.g. stock-assessment, SAI-VME assessments, EAF Roadmap implementation), exceeds current SC capacity (i.e. time, allocated resources and expertise). While SC has managed to address most requests so far, this has been achieved at the expense of substantially overburdening SC members. Present workloads are not sustainable. Meeting current demands would require an appreciable reduction in the number of upcoming special requests, as well as increasing SC capacity in different areas. The most critical gaps are in quantitative modelling for stock assessment, as well as more specialized ecosystem analyses and modelling.

The work plan will be posted after updating each June and September on the Commission SharePoint site in the Scientific Council Summary (SCS) document series (this year NAFO COM-SC Doc. 21-15).

The work plan was requested first in 2018 by the Commission in response to Scientific Council concerns over increased workload in recent years. It was recognized at that time that increased demands on Scientific Council (with more numerous and more complex requests, some of which are outside Council members areas of expertise) combined with a decrease in numbers of scientists participating, were making it difficult to address all requests over the year and to have thorough and transparent documentation.

The plan includes requests from the Commission from the annual meeting, including stock assessments and other scientific inquiries (e.g. requests from coastal states). The plan includes requests SC has made of its own accord.

The plan is structured first by using both the NAFO Road Map components and second by Commission request number.

The 5-year plan allows for a high-level view of activities planned for the next five years, with annual plans in which resource gaps and priorities will be addressed. More detailed plans are found in working group specific work plans.

In documenting resources needed as well as resource/capacity gaps, SC noted there is no dedicated NAFO funding source for scientific research, and therefore the activities are subject to Contracting Party allocations that may not be stable/guaranteed. SC updates and reviews the plan each June and September for the next year to include all requests with prioritization where appropriate as well as the resources required to respond to the requests. As such, the plan is a living document and September and June reviews will include prioritization of current versus strategic work/requests. Updated work plans will be posted on the NAFO Commission site in the Scientific Council Summary (SCS) series (this year NAFO SCS Doc. 21-15). The Excel version of the work plan will be made available each September to the Commission on the SharePoint.

At the June 2021 meeting, Scientific Council updated the work plan including identifying priorities and required resources.

Specific work plan highlights:

The SC notes that in the next two to three years the revision of two Management Strategies (redfish Div. 3LN and Greenland halibut Sub 2 Div. 3KLMNO) and the PAF revision coincide in time and, given the complexity and the high level of SC resources/capacity required to complete these tasks, SC strongly recommends against attempting to perform all three concurrently. Given the review of the PAF is well underway with dedicated external experts participating, SC recommends that the Commission prioritize one of the MSEs to commence first. SC expects the Greenland halibut MSE process to take at least two years to complete and the redfish MSE process to take at least three years. Consequently, the commencement of one of these MSE processes will need to be postponed and SC expects options will be discussed with WG-RBMS in the August 2021 meeting. In that context, SC and WG-RBMS can also discuss how to proceed to produce management advice for the affected stock in the interim.

Stock Assessments for June and September 2022 include:

- *3M cod*
- *3NO witch flounder*
- *3LNO Thorny skate*
- *3LN redfish (MSE will not complete in time for 2023 TAC)*
- *3O redfish*
- *SA 3+4 Northern shortfin squid*

Sub area 0+1:

- *SA 0 + 1 Greenland halibut*
- *Greenland halibut SA1 inshore*

NIPAG (targeting September 2021 pre-Commission):

- *3M N. shrimp*
- *N. shrimp in Denmark Strait*
- *N. shrimp SA 0 and 1*

Requests relating to Ecosystem productivity will be addressed in part through two planned WG-EAFFM meetings (dialogue session and workshop), to further progress the application of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, including progress on how ecosystem advice can inform management decisions.

While work on the 2021 re-assessment of NAFO bottom fisheries and VME fishery closures is largely complete, this task is ongoing, both to prepare for the next re-assessment as well as develop methods to assess changes in VME biomass inside closures to consider potential recoveries.

Despite the virtual environment for all Scientific Council meetings from March 2020 to June 2021 (and ongoing), the majority of requests and work planned was completed, and for those that were deferred, progress is planned for 2021-2022.

Special requests from the Commission, as well as the work required by SC to support ongoing requests more generally (e.g. stock-assessment, SAI-VME assessments, EAF Roadmap implementation), exceeds current SC capacity (i.e. time, allocated resources and expertise). While SC has managed to address most requests so far, this has been achieved at the expense of substantially overburdening SC members. Present workloads are not sustainable. Meeting current demands would require an appreciable reduction in the number of upcoming special requests, as well as increasing SC capacity in different areas. The most critical gaps are in quantitative modelling for stock assessment, as well as more specialized ecosystem analyses and modelling.

x) Request #11: Scoping exercise for 3LN redfish MSE

The Commission requests that the Scientific Council, carry out a scoping exercise to provide guidance to the WG-RBMS on the process of conducting of a full review/evaluation of the management strategy of Div. 3LN redfish.

Scientific Council responded:

Scientific Council conducted a scoping exercise for the review/evaluation of the management strategy of Div. 3LN redfish and proposed a provisional workplan. SC concluded that a full review/evaluation of the MSE for Div. 3LN redfish should include review of data and model inputs, followed by the identification of a suite of models to test the robustness of management procedures to alternative scenarios. This process is expected to take three years and its timing is conditional on decisions on the overall SC 5-year workplan (response to Commission request #10)

Background:

In 2014 SC, upon a request from the Fisheries Commission (now NAFO Commission-COM), conducted a review and evaluation of a management strategy of Div. 3LN redfish stock (NAFO, 2014).

At that time SC considered a range of operating models (OMs) based on the Schaeffer surplus production model. The following set of OMs were chosen for the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE):

i. *old stock assessment model updated to 2012 (ASPIC 2012)*

ii. *new stock assessment model (ASPIC 2014)*

iii. *"ASPIC2012-like" surplus production model in a Bayesian framework (same constraints on parameters)*

iv. *"ASPIC-like" new stock assessment in a Bayesian framework (ASPIC 2014 fixed MSY)*

v. *Surplus production model in a Bayesian framework with all data sets, minimum constraints*

vi. *A spatially disaggregated surplus production model in a Bayesian framework (treating carrying capacity in Div. 3L and 3N separately)*

In addition, the MSE considered 4 harvest control rules (HCR):

i. *HCR1 stepwise: (from WG-RBMS)*

ii. *HCR2 stepwise slow: this HCR is designed to reach 18 100 t of annual catch by 2019-2020 through a stepwise biennial catch increase, with the same amount of increase every two years between 2015 and 2020. 18 100 t is the equilibrium yield in 2014 assessment under the assumption of an MSY of 21 000 t.*

iii. *HCR3: Constant catch (20 000 t)*

iv. *HCR4: Constant F (2/3 of F_{MSY})*

In September 2014, the NAFO General Council / Fishery Commission (now COM) adopted HCR#2 for the period 2015-2020 (NAFO/FC Doc 14/29). This measure was to be in effect only until December 2020, but in September 2020 COM, based on SC advice (request #11, NAFO, 2020), extended the HCR for another two years (18 100 t – 2021 and 2022, NAFO/COM Doc. 20-19).

For a full review/evaluation of the management strategy of Div. 3LN redfish several steps should be taken, as in other MSEs:

1. *A data review – to ensure that the best data available are being used.*

   Review of the available biological, commercial and survey data and its possible use in the MSE process.

2. *Decision on the models to apply to the data.*

   Revision and discussion of the problems with the current OM's, as well as the development of new models that are required to cover any uncertainties that are identified (for example: sporadic recruitment events, stock mixing, modelling a mixed stock, etc.).

3. *Initiate discussion on the Operating Models (OM) to be used.*

   The original MSE had six different operating models. SC Canadian delegation have recently updated the OM's from the original MSE. The results of these updates may provide information for the development of a new MSE. It will also assist in the review of the different models and discussions regarding any new models. Final selection on operating models will likely be made later, after further developments as may be appropriate.

4. *Decisions on new objectives.*

   The current objective of the 3LN redfish HCR is "…to maintain the biomass in the 'safe zone', as defined by the NAFO Precautionary Approach framework". Any new MSE process will need to consider the validity of the current objectives, and any additional objectives with performance metrics.

   At the 2020 meeting of the WG-RBMS, new potential objectives for this MSE were discussed in a preliminary manner, as well as new possible HCRs. The decision of these new objectives and possible HCRs will require discussion at WG-RBMS and SC.

5. *Decisions on Harvest Control Rules.*

   It should be noted that the current HCR for 3LN redfish was a step-wise increasing TAC rule designed for an increasing stock, without feedback related to stock status. Given the declining trend of this stock, in both the current assessment model and survey indices, new HCRs must be developed which consider a declining stock and a potentially long period of low recruitment.

6. *Conduct an MSE process with the above information.*

   Development of models code, first runs of MSEs with proposed HCRs, evaluation of objectives and review of performance metrics.

   These actions will require substantial SC work depending on the decisions taken based on the experience in previous processes.

7. *Final decision on objectives, performance metrics for the objectives, first approach to HCRs to be considered.*

   These actions will require SC work and meetings between WG-RBMS and SC, with a final recommendation to the Commission.

Provisional work plan for a revised Management Strategy Evaluation for 3LN redfish

1. *SC June 2021 – Scoping discussion to provide possible direction for WG-RBMS on a full evaluation of the existing MSE.*

2. *WG-RBMS August 2021 – discussion on scoping exercise and a possible calendar of how to develop the 3LN redfish MSE which is a three-year process. Note that an assessment of 3LN redfish will be required in June 2022 to provide advice to COM for 2023/2024.*

3. *Year 1: SC must review the data to be used; consensus is required at this time for Operating Model (OM) development to commence.*

4. *Year 2: SC must review the proposed OMs to be used; obtain consensus on Candidate Management Procedures (CMPs), and with WG-RBMS refine the performance statistics, including risk tolerances and constraints.*

5. *Year 3: SC must review and test CMPs; finalise the suite of CMPs to be used in the Management Strategy Evaluation; and with WG-RBMS evaluate performance statistics and make a final decision on the Management Strategy to propose to the Commission.*

SC notes that this process is expected to take three years and its timing is conditional on decisions on the overall SC 5-year workplan (response to Commission request #10).

xi) Request #12: Review of submitted survey protocol for splendid alfonsino

The Commission requests the Scientific Council review submitted protocols for a survey methodology to inform the assessment of Splendid Alfonsino. The Scientific Council to report on the outcome of this work at next Commission annual meeting.

Scientific Council responded:

Scientific Council considers the acoustic survey plan presented is appropriate to collect fishery-independent information to establish a consistent time-series that can help the future evaluation of this stock.

The SC reviewed SCR Doc. 20/036 in which a possible sampling plan for an acoustic survey on Kükenthal Peak (NAFO Division 6G) to quantify alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*) biomass, abundance and size composition was presented. Acoustic surveys have previously been used in other parts of the world to assess alfonsino stock size, distribution and size composition (Niklitschek et al., 2011, Wiff et al., 2012).

The main objectives of this survey plan are to estimate the distribution, abundance, biomass and size composition of alfonsino on Kükenthal Peak (NAFO Div. 6G) by conducting a hydroacoustic survey. Specific objectives are:

- *Estimate the abundance (in number) and biomass (in weight) of alfonsino in Kükenthal Peak.*
- *Estimate the alfonsino size composition, length-weight relationship, sex ratio and sexual maturity characterization by sex.*
- *Collection of alfonsino gonad and otolith samples for future studies of maturity and age.*
- *Characterize the biological environment and the physical environment (Tº, S ‰) of the pelagic habitat of this species to produce a map of these variables within the survey area in association with alfonsino abundance estimates.*

The proposed plan is to use a commercial vessel for collecting acoustic data to obtain biomass, abundance and size composition estimates. The best option from a technical point of view could be to use the same vessel that has been fishing in the area since 2004. The "Esperanza Menduiña" fishing vessel was built in 1988 and sails under the flag of Spain. This vessel has the appropriate acoustic and fishing equipment to carry out the survey, and, perhaps more importantly, its crew has knowledge of the species and the area, and experience necessary for the proper execution of this survey.

Two strata with different levels of sampling effort are proposed due to the patchy distribution of alfonsino as revealed by the echograms provided by the skipper, and also the major occurrence of the species around the slope of the mountains, with little extension towards deeper water (i.e., no extension towards open waters). The survey design will consist of systematic parallel transects with random starting points, with two different levels of sampling intensity, allocating the maximum effort in the area that historically contained the bulk of the acoustic and trawl commercial records. Transects will be placed to ensure they are primarily perpendicular to the bathymetry of the survey area.

There is some evidence that relates vertical migrations of alfonsino concentrations to light levels related to diurnal and lunar cycles. The acoustic survey will collect acoustic data during the daylight hours for the calculation of biomass and abundance. Nevertheless, the area will be also surveyed at night during the first year in order to obtain insights on the alfonsino behaviour (i.e., diel aggregation and distribution patterns). Trawl hauls will be conducted only for fish identification and the collection of alfonsino length distribution and biological data. Therefore, trawl station locations will be selected according to the acoustic records.

During the presentation of this acoustic survey plan, several questions were raised in the SC related to the Target Strength (TS) that will be used in the absolute estimates of biomass (however, it is noted that an existing TS-length conversion exists for alfonsino), the possible distribution of the resource in greater depths of the acoustic coverage which may result in underestimates of stock size, as well as the close spacing of survey transects and whether this could overestimate biomass.

The SC noted that many of these problems are related to the scarcity of information available to better inform survey design at this point. Therefore, the design of this or other surveys may be adjusted after the first year as more information about alfonsino becomes available. The SC considers the acoustic survey plan presented is appropriate to collect fishery independent information to establish a consistent time-series that can help the future evaluation of this stock.

References

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Whiff, J. C. Quiroz, A. Flores and P. Galvez. 2012. An overview of the alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*) fishery in Chile. Workshop on Management of Alfonsino Fisheries. 25

xii) Request #13: Presentation of the stock assessment and the scientific advice of Cod 2J3KL (Canada), Witch 2J3KL (Canada) and Pelagic Sebastes mentella (ICES Divisions V, XII and XIV; NAFO 1)

The Commission requests that results from stock assessments and the scientific advice of Cod 2J3KL (Canada), Witch 2J3KL (Canada) and Pelagic Sebastes mentella (ICES Divisions V, XII and XIV; NAFO 1) to be presented to the Scientific Council (SC), and request the SC to prepare a summary of these assessments to be included in its annual report.

Stock assessment and scientific advice for Cod 2J3KL (Canada),

The results of the most recent stock assessments and scientific advice of Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) (“Northern cod”, Divs. 2J3KL) was presented to SC. The summary is as follows:

The Atlantic cod *Gadus morhua* stock on the Newfoundland and Labrador continental shelf in NAFO Divs. 2J3KL (“Northern cod”) is typically assessed annually by Fisheries and Oceans Canada using an age-structured state-space model (Northern Cod Assessment Model; NCAM, Cadigan 2016a and 2016b). A conservation limit reference point (LRP) was established for Northern cod in 2010 (DFO 2010), re-evaluated in 2019 (DFO 2019a), and is defined as the average spawning stock biomass (SSB) during the 1980s. This reference point is the stock level below which serious harm is occurring and the ability to produce good recruitment is seriously impaired. This reference point also defines the boundary between the critical and cautious zones within Fishery and Oceans Canada’s (DFO) Precautionary Approach (PA) framework (DFO 2009).

The 2021 stock assessment reported that the Northern cod spawning stock biomass (SSB) remained at 52% (95% CI = 39-69%) of the Limit Reference Point, in the Critical Zone of DFO’s PA framework (DFO 2009; DFO 2021) (Figure xii.1). SSB was 411 Kt in 2021 (95% CI = 307-549 Kt).

A one year projection carried out with six catch scenarios ranging from zero to 1.3 times the model estimated catch for 2020 (11 815 t) indicated that the probability that SSB would reach the LRP by 2022 was less than 1%.

Ecosystem conditions in the Newfoundland Shelf and Northern Grand Bank (NAFO Divs. 2J3KL) are indicative of limited productivity of the fish community. Total RV biomass level remains much lower than prior to the ecosystem collapse in the early-1990s.

Recent declines in average cod stomach content weights as well as reductions in capelin and shrimp in the diet, coupled with an apparent relative increase in cannibalism, point to a limitation in food availability. With capelin forecasted to decline to 2022, cod productivity will likely be negatively impacted.

Annual average removals from the commercial (stewardship) fishery were 11,000 t over 2016-2019 (Figure xii.2) and removals from recreational catches were about 2000 t (estimated from tagging data) over the same time period.

The advice from this assessment stated: “Consistency with the DFO decision-making framework incorporating the precautionary approach requires that removals from all sources must be kept at the lowest possible level until the stock clears the critical zone”.

SC comments:

In September 2020 SC asked for some clarification on the objectives and management measures from the stewardship fishery, given that catches are occurring. Colleagues from the Canadian delegation explained that this was with the intent to allow limited harvest for the benefit of local inshore fishers while allowing science to gain insights on cod abundance in inshore areas, and further inform fishers' participation in the annual science and management processes.

SC endorsed the conclusions of both the assessment results and advice.

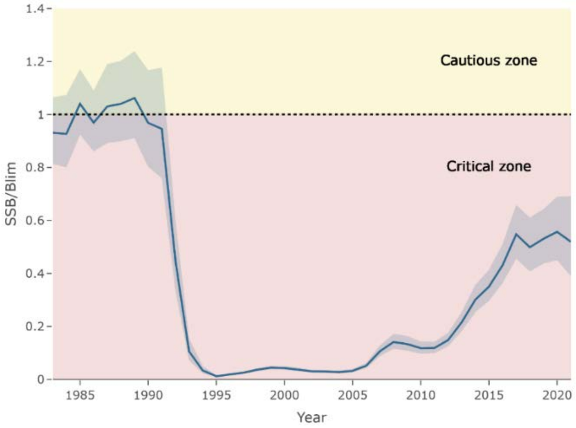

Figure xii.1. SSB/*B*$_{lim}$ for Northern cod from NCAM (1983-2021) from the 2021 assessment.

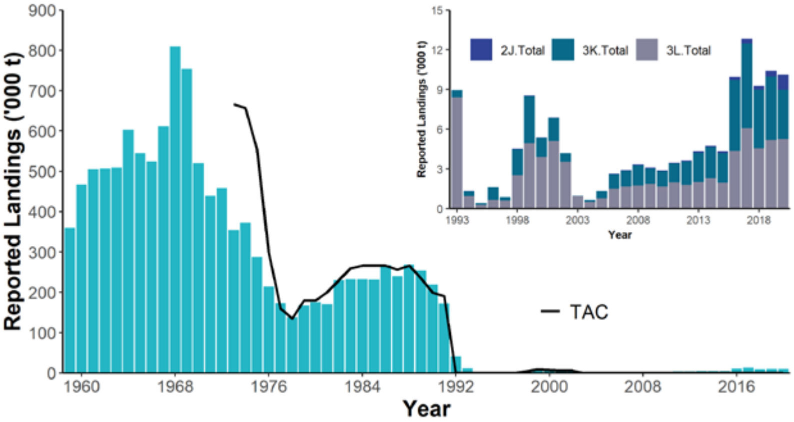

Figure xii.2. Landings (bars) and TAC (lines) for Atlantic Cod in Div. 2J3KL by Division from 1959 to 2020 (and inset plot show 1993-2020 by NAFO Division).

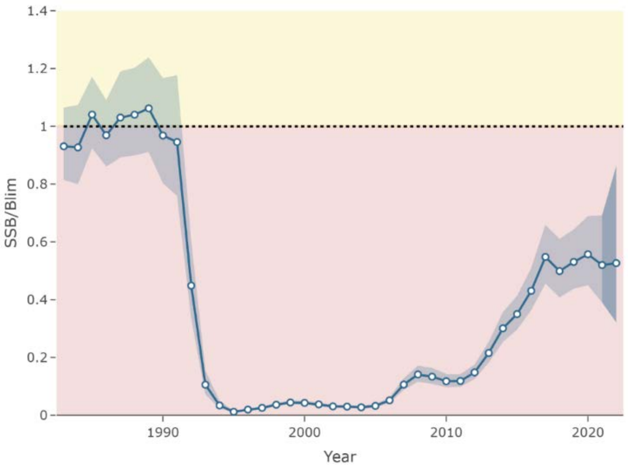

Figure xii.3. One year projection (to 2022) of Northern cod SSB under status quo NCAM-predicted catch levels (11 816 t) relative to the limit reference point *B_{lim}*, where *B_{lim}* (horizontal dashed line) is defined as the average SSB during the 1980s. Solid line with circles is the model median estimate and light grey envelope is 95% confidence intervals. Dark grey envelope are 95% confidence intervals for the projection period.

Update on witch founder in NAFO Divs. 2J3KL

There has been no update to the assessment and advice of witch flounder (*Glyptocephalus cynoglossus*) in Divs. 2J3KL since the last update was presented to SC in September 2020.

The last assessment of witch flounder in NAFO Divs. 2J3KL was completed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) in May 2018 (DFO 2019b, Wheeland et al., 2019). B_{2017} was below the limit reference point (LRP), and the stock is in the Critical Zone of the Canadian Precautionary Approach framework. Consistency with the DFO decision-making framework incorporating the precautionary approach, requires that removals from all sources must be kept at the lowest possible level until the stock clears the critical zone. This stock has been under moratorium in Canadian waters since 1995, and in the NAFO regulatory area since 1998. Bycatch of witch flounder averaged 106 t annually from 2015-19, and provisional bycatch in 2020 was 114 t (Figure xii.4).

In years between full assessments survey biomass trajectory is monitored (see DFO 2019 for details on the agreed procedure) to determine if there is a need for an assessment. Survey indices from 2018 to 2020 have not been fully peer reviewed at this time, but an assessment has not been triggered.

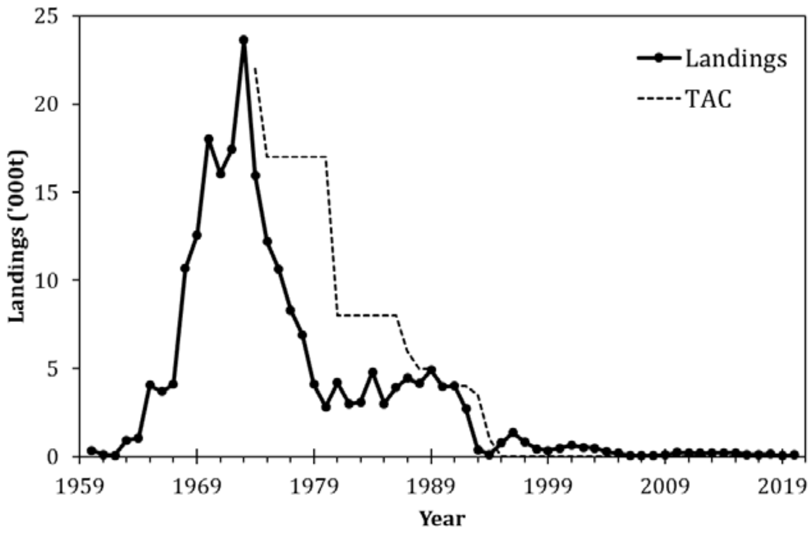

Figure xii.4. Landings (1960-2020, line) and TAC (points) for witch flounder in Div. 2J3KL.

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Wheeland, L. 2018. Limit reference point for Witch Flounder in NAFO Divisions 2J+3KL. NAFO SCR Doc. 18/050.

Wheeland, L., Rogers, B., Rideout, R., and Maddock Parsons, D. 2019. Assessment of Witch Flounder (*Glyptocephalus cynoglossus*) NAFO Divisions 2J3KL. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Res. Doc. 2019/066. iv + 57 p.

Update on Pelagic *Sebastes mentella* (ICES Divisions 5, 12 and 14; NAFO 1):

This stock is assessed by ICES and no new developments have occurred since SC last presented a review, in September 2020. It is understood that ICES will be conducting a new assessment in September 2021, which will be discussed in SC once ICES makes it publicly available. This may not occur in time for the September 2021 SC meeting, in which case SC will discuss it in its June 2022 meeting.

xiii) Request #14: Conduct ongoing analysis of the Flemish Cap cod fishery data

The Commission requests the Scientific Council, jointly with the Secretariat, to conduct ongoing analysis of the Flemish Cap cod fishery data by 2022 in order to:

(1) monitor the consequences of the management decisions (including the analysis of the redistribution of the fishing effort along the year and its potential effects on ecosystems, the variation of the cod catch composition in lengths/ages, and the bycatch levels of other fish species, benthos in general, and VME taxa in particular), and

(2) carry out any additional monitoring that would be required, including Div. 3M cod caught as bycatch in other fisheries during the closed period.

Scientific Council responded:

Given that only one year of data with the new measures will be available for this evaluation by June 2022, the analysis that SC will present next year will have to be completed in subsequent years as the relevant dataset increases.

The evaluation will compare the situation before and after the measures were in place, and will include analyses of, at least, the following aspects:

- *Fishing pattern (e.g. spatial and temporal distribution of catch and effort).*
- *Impact of the fishing activity on VMEs.*
- *Length / age composition of the cod catch.*
- *Bycatch levels of 3M cod and distribution in other fisheries.*
- *Bycatch levels of other species in the 3M cod fishery.*

The new management measures agreed by the Commission in 2020 include 1) a seasonal closure of the fishery for cod in Div. 3M during the first quarter of the year to preserve spawning activity, and 2) the use of sorting grids in the directed 3M cod fishery with the purpose of reducing catches of smaller individuals of cod. These measures came into force at the beginning of 2021 and a preliminary evaluation of their effectiveness and consequences will be conducted by SC in June 2022. Given that only one year of data with the new measures will be available for this evaluation and considering the sampling limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the low level of TAC, only initial results will be available in June 2022. The full analysis will be completed in subsequent years as the relevant dataset increases.

This preliminary evaluation will compare the situation before (the period for which the haul-by-haul data is available, 2016-2020) and after the measures were in place (since 2021), and include analyses of at least the following aspects:

- *Fishing pattern (e.g. spatial and temporal distribution of catch and effort).*
- *Impact of the fishing activity on VMEs.*
- *Length / age composition of the cod catch.*
- *Bycatch levels of 3M cod and distribution in other fisheries.*
- *Bycatch levels of other species in the 3M cod fishery.*

xiv) Request #15: measures to reduce the catch of juvenile and immature cod across all fisheries in 3M

The Commission requests the Scientific Council, in its future work, to consider whether other measures, such as depth restrictions, spatial and mesh changes, could reduce the catch of juvenile and immature cod across all fisheries in 3M.

Scientific Council responded:

SC considers that the effectiveness of the newly implemented measures in the 3M directed cod fishery should be evaluated before considering if additional and/or different measures may be required to further reduce juvenile cod catches.

The bycatch of 3M cod in other fisheries observed in 2016-2020 is considered low (both in weight and in number of individuals) when compared to the directed cod fishery. SC considers that, at this time, the implementation of measures to avoid juvenile cod bycatch in fisheries not directed to cod would be premature, given that the burden of implementing and enforcing these measures on multiple fisheries may outweigh its potential benefits.

An analysis of all 3M cod catches (from the directed fishery as well as bycatch in other fisheries) for years 2016-2020 was performed (SCR 21/021).

Results from the analysis of the directed fishery may not be fully applicable to the fishery after 2021 due to the technical measures implemented in January 2021, which are expected to impact selectivity.

Most cod catches in Div. 3M were taken in the directed cod fishery. Bycatch of cod in other fisheries represents less than 5% of cod total catches (Table xiv.1). Most of the cod bycatch is taken in the redfish fishery, which is mainly carried out in the first and third quarters of the year at depths of 300-600 meters (Figure xiv.1).

Table xiv.1. 3M cod catch in tons by year based on the Haul by Haul data, in the directed cod fishery and bycatch in other fisheries. The right-most column is the cod bycatch taken in the redfish fishery, expressed as a percentage with respect to the total cod bycatch across all fisheries in 3M.

	3M cod catch (tons)			% cod bycatch	Bycatch of 3M cod by fishery							RED (%)
Year	**Directed**	**bycatch**	**Total**		**CAB (t)**	**GHL (t)**	**HAD (t)**	**HAL (t)**	**RED (t)**	**REG (t)**	**WIT (t)**	
2016	10980.5	341.0	11321.5	3.0	0.0	0.0	12.3	0.4	302.5	0.0	6.2	94.5
2017	9775.1	192.8	9967.9	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	187.6	0.0	4.8	97.3
2018	10213.3	494.4	10707.6	4.6	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	484.0	0.0	8.5	97.9
2019	18723.1	379.7	19102.9	2.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.6	374.2	1.8	0.8	98.6
2020	6931.9	360.9	7292.8	4.9	0.0	4.9	0.0	0.0	320.1	0.0	35.9	88.7
Mean	**11324.8**	**353.8**	**11678.5**	**3.3**	**0.4**	**1.4**	**2.5**	**0.3**	**333.7**	**0.4**	**11.2**	**95.4**

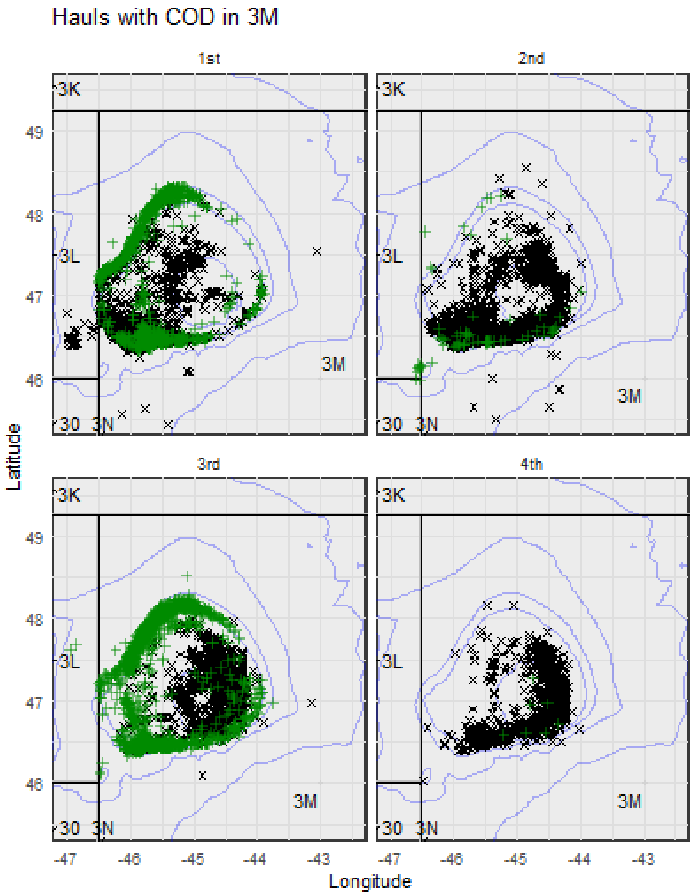

Figure xiv.1. Position of all hauls with cod by quarter. In black, hauls directed to cod. In green, hauls with bycatch of cod.

The number of length samples from cod bycatch in the Div. 3M redfish fishery is low. Still, most sampled hauls targeting redfish do not contain cod smaller than the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) (41 cm), and a large number of these hauls have more than 90% of mature individuals (greater than 52 cm). In terms of size distribution, the cod bycatch has a larger proportion of small fish than the directed fishery, especially during the first semester (Figure xiv.2), but this needs to be commensurate with the much lower amount of cod caught as bycatch (Table xiv.1).

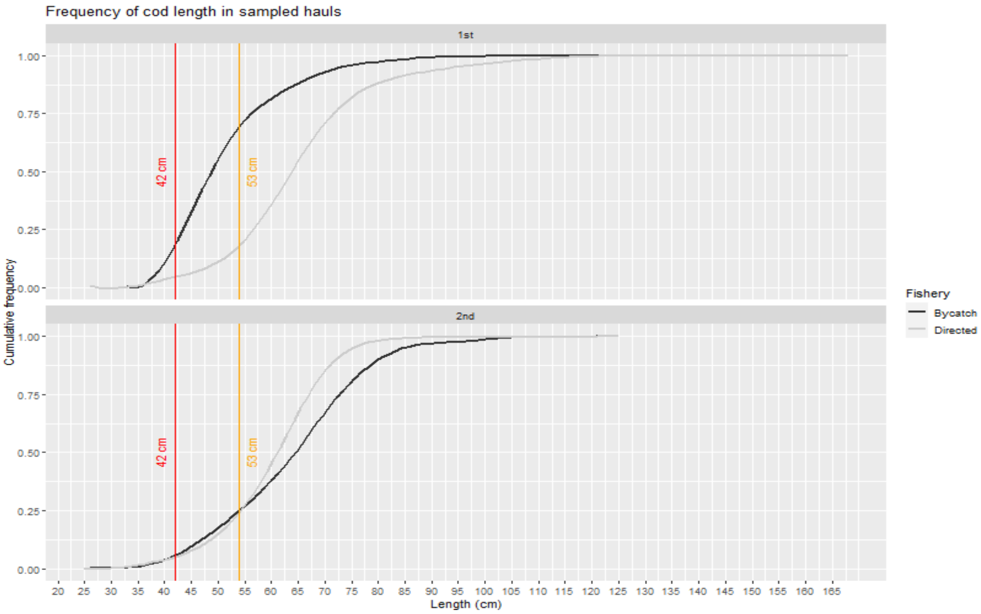

Figure xiv.2. Cumulative frequency of the lengths of 3M cod in the sampled hauls, for the directed and the bycatch fishery, by semester.

In conclusion, the bycatch of 3M cod in other fisheries observed in 2016-2020 is considered low (both in weight and in number of individuals) when compared to the directed cod fishery. While the actual impact of this bycatch is unknown, these levels of bycatch would not be expected to have had significant impacts on the trajectory of the stock during this period. A large proportion of the cod caught, both as bycatch and in the directed fishery, were above the MLS, with most of them being mature. Therefore, SC considers that, at this time, the implementation of measures to avoid juvenile cod bycatch in fisheries not directed to cod would be premature, given that the burden of implementing and enforcing these measures on multiple fisheries may outweigh its potential benefits. With respect to the directed 3M cod fishery, and considering that new measures have been just implemented, SC considers it prudent to first analyze the effectiveness of these measures (i.e. sorting grids) to protect juveniles before considering which additional and/or different measures may be required to further reduce juvenile cod catches if needed.

xv) Request #16: updates on relevant research related to activities other than fishing

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue to monitor and provide updates resulting from relevant research related to the potential impact of activities other than fishing in the Convention Area. Further, that the Secretariat and the Scientific Council work with other international organizations, such as the FAO and ICES, to bring in additional expertise to inform the Scientific Council's work.

Scientific Council responded:

SC reiterates its **recommendation** that standardized protocols for marine litter data collection should be implemented by all Contracting Parties as part of their groundfish surveys.

SC reiterates its prior advice that there are a number of activities occurring in the NRA (especially oil and gas activities) which have the potential to impact fisheries resources and the ecosystem, and that current expertise within SC WG-ESA in particular, and SC in general, is insufficient to fully assess the long term, cumulative impacts of these activities on the wider marine ecosystem and specifically VMEs.

SC notes that while there is an apparent significant spatial conflict between oil and gas exploration and production activities, fisheries and VME in the Flemish Pass area, activities other than fishing occurring in the NRA are not formally, nor regularly reported to SC.

Furthermore, SC notes that based on available information on exploration leases and development projections, it would be expected that oil and gas exploration and production activities will increase in the NRA until at least 2030. However, the oil and gas sector is currently experiencing significant and rapid changes globally, so it is difficult to gauge how these changes may impact projects in the NRA.

SC reiterates its advice that periodic up-dates of the Ecosystem Summary Sheets for these activities is dependent on Contracting Parties making effective their commitments and **recommends** to a) establish regular reporting of activities other than fishing with sufficient detail to allow for adequate analysis and assessment, and b) increase SC capacity to address these issues.

Standardized protocol for collection of seabed litter data in the EU groundfish surveys

Scientific Council recommended to the NAFO Commission that standardized protocols for seabed litter data collection should be implemented by all Contracting Parties as part of their groundfish surveys, to facilitate the on-going monitoring and assessment of seabed litter in the NAFO area.

In line with such recommendation, the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) developed a protocol to be used in all the EU groundfish surveys in the NRA. The objective of the protocol is to expand the seabed litter data collection started in year 2006 (García-Alegre *et. al*., 2020) in the Flemish Pass (Div. 3L) to the other areas sampled by the EU surveys: Flemish Cap (Div. 3M) and the Grand Banks (Divs. 3NO) using a common methodology and standardized forms. This protocol was implemented in Divs. 3LNO (2018) and Div. 3M (2019) as a pilot experiment. In 2020, a common standardized protocol was ready to use in all the EU groundfish surveys in the NRA, but this year, due to COVID-19 situation, only the EU-Spain & Portugal groundfish survey (Div. 3M) was conducted. For each haul, all items collected by the bottom trawl gear were examined, counted, weighed, categorized and recorded onboard. Moreover, the size of items was recorded and photos were taken, when possible. Table xv.1. summarizes the information on seabed litter available from EU groundfish surveys. Data from 2006-17 (Div. 3L) has previously been summarized (NAFO, 2019; García-Alegre et al., 2020)[28]. Results indicate a generally low occurrence and density of seabed litter, with only 8.3% of hauls having seabed litter present; however, 62% of the seabed litter sampled were identified as being associated with both NAFO managed and non-managed fishing activities.

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[28] EU Funded projects ATLAS (A Transatlantic Assessment and Deep-water Ecosystem-based Spatial Management Plan for Europe) and CLEANATLANTIC (Tracking Marine Litter in the Atlantic Area)

Table xv.1. Information on seabed litter available from EU groundfish surveys.

NAFO Divs.	Data period	Source
3L	2006-2019	EU-Spain groundfish survey
3NO	2018-2019	EU-Spain groundfish survey
3M	2019-2020	EU-Spain & Portugal groundfish survey

Update on oil and gas activities

Information on geographical location of offshore oil and gas activities in the NAFO Convention Area (wells, licenses, proposed project areas, etc.) is publicly available from several sources, including websites and project reports (e.g. https://oilandgas.nalcorenergy.com/ness/overview/). In contrast, available information on the potential impacts of such activities (routine operations and accidental events) in the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA) and the corresponding mitigation measures is scarce or difficult to obtain.

Based on the available information on exploration leases and development projections, oil and gas exploration and production activities would be expected to increase in the NRA until at least 2030. However, the oil and gas sector is currently experiencing significant and rapid changes globally, so it is difficult to gauge how these changes may impact projects in the NRA.

Offshore oil and gas activities can have detrimental environmental effects during each of the main phases of exploration, production, and decommissioning (Cordes et al., 2016), but these impacts have not been adequately assessed within the NRA. Environmental effects include impacts from routine operational activities such as drilling waste and produced water discharges (Neff et al., 2011; Neff et al., 2014), accidental discharges and spills (Cordes et al., 2016, https://www.cnlopb.ca/incidents/ibjul182019/), long-term impacts on deep-sea corals (e.g., Girard and Fisher, 2018) and impacts on deep-sea sponges and their associated habitats (Vad et al., 2016).

The map in Figure xv.1 shows the updated information on oil and gas activities in NAFO Divs. 3LMN, collected from publicly available sources. In comparison with the information assessed previously reported by WG-ESA (NAFO, 2019), the updated map reveals an increase of the exploration activities within Divs. 3LMN. The map shows four additional *Wells* located in Div. 3L (one of them inside NAFO Closed Area No2 (large sponges)), two additional *Significant Discovery Licenses* in Div. 3M and several additional *Exploration licenses* in Divs. 3LN. Figure xv.1 also shows an additional *Exploration Drilling Project* that can proceed in Divs. 3LM, involving exploration drilling within two *Exploration licenses* within the Flemish Pass Basin (EL1144 and EL1150: see location in Figure xv.2). Moreover, the updated map reveals the overlap, and potential conflicts, between different regulatory and jurisdictional frameworks (e.g., NAFO and C-NLOPB[29]). Vulnerable ecosystems inside NAFO VME closures (and/or outside NAFO footprint) are currently protected against Significant Adverse Impacts from commercial bottom fishing, but they are unprotected regarding potential threats from activities other than fishing (e.g., drilling activities inside VME closures in Divs. 3LM).

Some of the oil and gas exploration and proposed production activities in Divs. 3LMN, appear to have significant spatial overlap with NAFO fisheries and VMEs, which could result in potential conflicts between users of the marine space (e.g., reduction of fishing opportunities) and between users and the environment (e.g., VMEs). Particularly, this is the case of the Bay du Nord Development Project (Figures xv.1 and xv.2) located in the Flemish Pass. Figure xv.2 shows the details of the planned production installations (i.e., templates, flowlines, FPSO vessel, anchors, and moorings), the location of some templates within NAFO Closed Area 10 (sea pen) as

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[29] Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board

well as future potential tie-back opportunities inside a VME polygon and close to the NAFO fishing grounds. This could result in a future expansion of the Proposed Core Development Area of the project (outlined in red in Figures xv.1 and xv.2), which is a cause for concern.

Pollution incidents are often a source of conflicts between different users of the marine space and between users and the marine ecosystems (Durán Muñoz et al*.,* 2020). Table xv.2 summarizes the updated information on recent incidents, including a transboundary oil spill, derived from offshore oil and gas activities in the Northwest Atlantic, based on available data. During the period 2015-2020, there have been twelve reported incidents of different nature, with a major oil spill in 2018 (250 000 L), and one in 2019 that occurred in the EEZ of the coastal state but extended outside the EEZ into the NAFO Regulatory Area. Other incidents included a near-miss collision between an iceberg and an oil platform in March 2017 and the occurrence of unauthorized discharges in recent years, revealing the potential risks of offshore oil and gas activities in the Northwest Atlantic. There is a need to assess the cumulative impacts of human activities (e.g., fisheries and oil and gas exploration/exploitation) on the NAFO ecosystems. Moreover, in order to better understand the contribution of each anthropogenic activity, impacts should be assessed both inside VME polygons and VME closure areas (e.g., NAFO Closed Areas 10 and 2).

Information presented here, based on the results from the EU ATLAS research project and public information, will be useful to update the current 3LNO Ecosystem Summary Sheet (ESS) and to develop the 3M ESS.

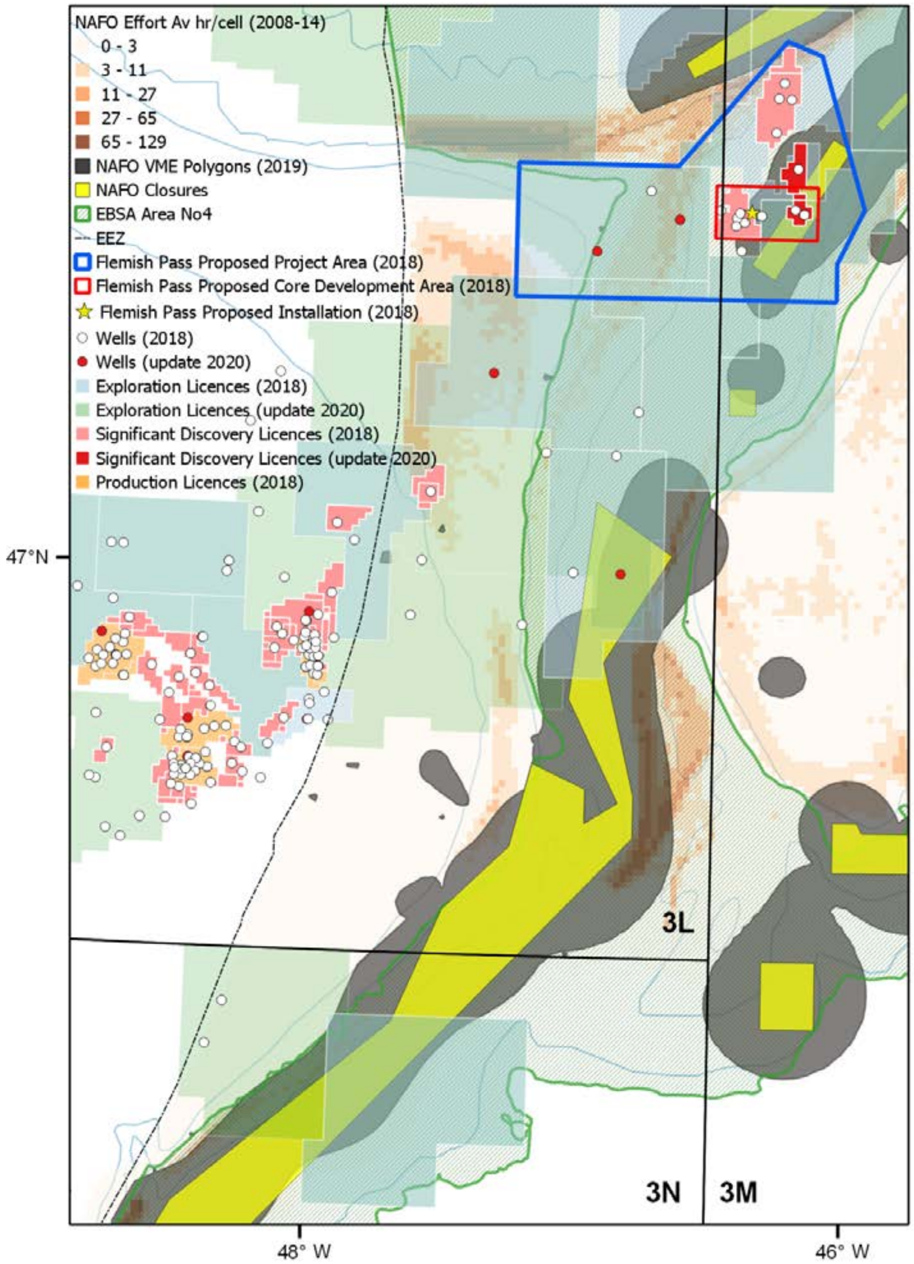

Figure xv.1. Geographical location of oil and gas activities in NAFO Divs. 3LMN. The map shows the potential conflicts between different users of the marine space (e.g. oil and gas vs. fisheries) and between users and marine environment (oil and gas vs. VMEs). The yellow star indicates the location of the proposed production installation within the Bay du Nord Development Project in the Flemish Pass (outlined in blue). Information previously reported by WG-ESA (NAFO, 2018) and new available information (2020) is noted in brackets. Sources: NAFO, C-NLOPB, NESS and CBD.

Table xv.2. Updated list of recent offshore oil spills and other relevant incidents in the NW Atlantic, based on available information. Period 2015-2020 (source C-NLOPB).

Date	Incident description	Observations
20/07/2020	Unauthorized Discharge (Hibernia Platform)	Produced water discharge (mixture of seawater from the reservoir/used in injection, drilling and production fluids). The volume of the discharge and its composition are being determined
18/06/2020	Unauthorized Discharge (SeaRose FPSO), White Rose Field	1,098 L of an anti-microbial agent (X-Cide 450) was released along with 1,916,000 litres of water that were intended for reservoir injection.
17/08/2019	Hibernia Oil Spill	Estimated volume of oil on the water was 2,184 L at that time
17/07/2019	Hibernia Oil Spill	Oil expressed on the water could be in the order of 12,000 L. It occurred inside Canadian EEZ, but the analysis indicated that the oil was extended outside the EEZ and into the NAFO NRA[30]
16/10/2018	White Rose Field Oil Spill	250,000 L of oil were released to the environment
27/04/2018	Unauthorized Discharge of Synthetic Based Mud (SBM) (Transocean Barents platform)	28,000 L of SBM was released to the environment
29/03/2017	Near Miss - Iceberg Approaches Close to the SeaRose Floating Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) Vessel	A medium size iceberg came within 180 meters of the FPSO (about 340,000 barrels of crude oil on board at that time)
15/07/2016	Unauthorized Discharge/Impairment of safety critical equipment (Henry Goodrich drilling)	Approximately 1,800 L of hydraulic fluid was released to the environment
15/02/2016	Unauthorized Discharge of glycol (West Aquarius)	1,317 L of glycol was released to the sea
30/09/2015	Unauthorized Discharge of methanol (Terra Nova field)	3,000 L of methanol was released to the sea
31/08/2015	Major hydrocarbon gas release (Southern drill center)	8,938 kg of natural gas was released to the sea
28/07/2015	Major hydrocarbon gas release (Terra Nova FPSO)	10,000 kg of gas was released

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[30] Ref. NAFO/19-205. 23 July 2019.

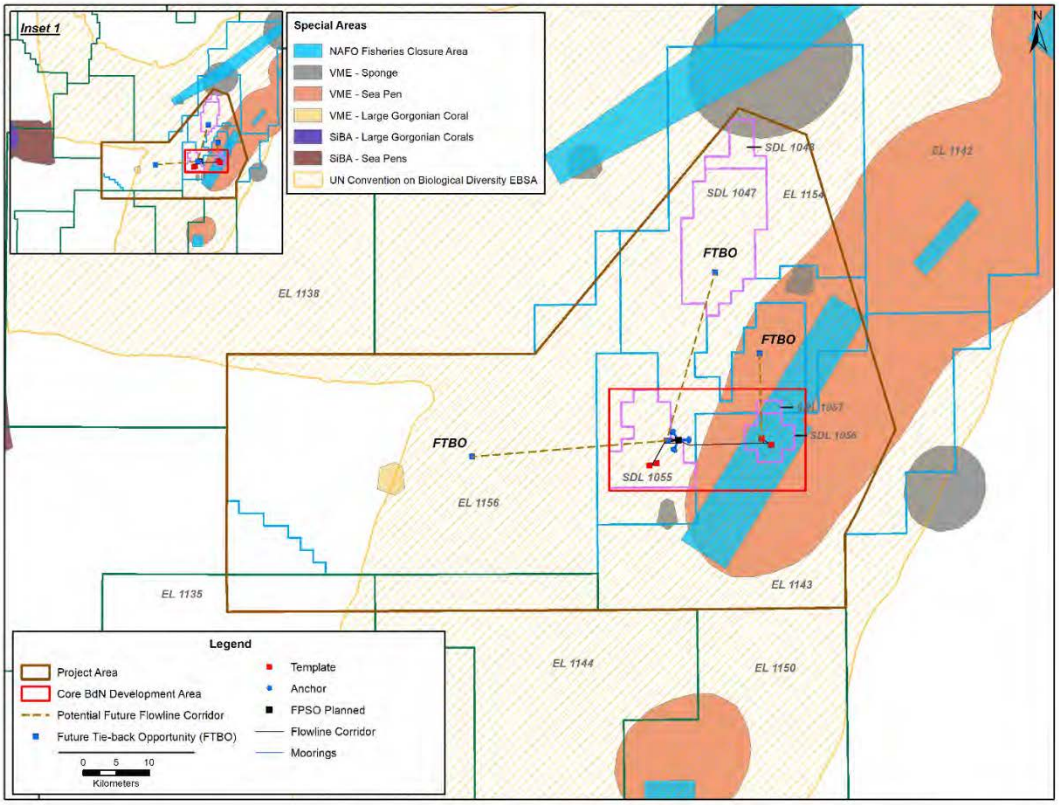

Figure xv.2 Details of the planned production installations (i.e., templates, flowlines, FPSO vessel, anchors, moorings) within the Bay du Nord Development Project in the Flemish Pass (outlined in brown). The map shows the location of templates within NAFO Closed Area No 10 (sea pen) as well as potential tie-back opportunities inside VME polygon and close to the fishing grounds. The figure also shows the geographical location of two *Exploration Licences* (EL1144 and EL1150). Source: Equinor Canada Ltd. (2020).

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xvi) Request #17: Information on sea turtles, sea birds, and marine mammals that are present in NAFO Regulatory Area

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to provide information to the Commission at its next annual meeting on sea turtles, sea birds, and marine mammals that are present in NAFO Regulatory Area based on available data.

Scientific Council responded:

SC noted that most marine mammals, turtles and seabirds are widespread through the northwest Atlantic and undertake extensive seasonal migrations, often moving across the North Atlantic or from the Caribbean to the Arctic. The Grand Bank is a transition zone with both Arctic and temperate species occurring. There is considerable uncertainty about the residence time of taxa in the NAFO Regulatory Area (NRA). Data for this assessment came from scientific surveys, opportunistic sightings, acoustic recorders, satellite telemetry studies and also from bycatch reporting and light-level geolocators.

There are approximately 25 cetacean and seven pinniped species present in the NAFO Convention Area (NCA), with most of them widely distributed across the part of the Convention Area which lies beyond the areas in which Costal States exercise fisheries jurisdiction, outside of the Exclusive Economic Zones (i.e., NRA). Of these, five pinnipeds (walrus, and ring, bearded, harbour, and grey seals) and two cetaceans (beluga and narwhal) are unlikely to occur in the NRA because they are mainly observed in nearshore waters.

Three species of sea turtles, loggerhead, green and leatherback, have been reported in the NRA. However, only leatherback turtles occur regularly.

An initial literature review indicates a total of 58 species of seabird have been found to use the NCA and, of those, 31 species have more specific geographic data that indicates they use the NRA. Families Laridae (terns and gulls), Procellariidae (petrels and shearwaters), Stercorariidae (skuas and jaegers) and Alcidae (puffins and murres) make up 27 of the 31 species observed in the NRA.

Data on the presence and abundance of marine mammals and turtles in the NAFO regulatory area are obtained from dedicated sighting surveys, opportunistic sightings, acoustic recorders, and satellite telemetry studies. However, the amount of survey data available from the NRA is limited as a result of difficulties reaching the area with survey aircraft, while opportunistic sightings reflect the distribution of observers rather than the distribution of animals. Marine mammal observers during the Spanish groundfish survey (Div. 3L) and on the fishing fleet (Div. 3LMNO) have provided some information on cetacean species presence in the NRA, based on sightings from an opportunistic sampling (Roman-Marcote et al., 2019; SCR Doc. 20/023). The deployment of acoustic recorders in offshore areas is recent and not fully analyzed. These instruments provide information on the presence or absence of individual species although preliminary analyses have indicated that identification of marine mammals present is difficult because of the high level of background noise from vessels and seismic activity.

Being highly mobile, marine mammals and turtles utilize large areas, often moving across the North Atlantic or from the Caribbean to the Arctic. Most species are seasonal migrants although some individuals may remain year-round, particularly in the warmer waters near the tail of the Grand Bank. Many of the cetaceans and turtles winter in southern waters, but summer on the Grand Bank and in the NRA, while others, such as harp and hooded seals, summer in the Arctic and winter on the Newfoundland Shelf and Grand Bank.

The Grand Bank is a transition zone with both Arctic and temperate species occurring. As a result, approximately 25 cetacean and seven pinniped species are present in the NAFO Convention Area (NCA). Of these, five pinnipeds (walrus, and ring, bearded, harbour, and grey seals) and two cetaceans (beluga and narwhal) are mainly observed in nearshore waters and so unlikely to occur in the NRA. Many of the remaining species, such as minke, humpback and killer whales, and most of the small cetaceans and harbour porpoise, are widely distributed across the continental shelf, including the NRA. They are also occasionally sighted in the deep water off the shelf edge. Sperm whales are commonly reported in NRA in both the opportunistic sightings database and by Spanish observers and groundfish surveys. Fin whales are also widely spread throughout the NCA, although a habitat suitability model identified the nose and tail of the Grand Bank, Flemish Pass and

Orphan Basin areas as important habitat during the spring and summer. The southern edge of the Grand Bank was also identified as important habitat for the endangered Northwest Atlantic blue whale population.

Some species are most commonly found along the continental slope. Long finned pilot whales were reported in the Flemish Pass (Div. 3L) by the Spanish groundfish surveys. Beaked whales (family Ziphiidae) are a poorly understood group that inhabit offshore slope habitats and appear to be particularly sensitive to sound. The best known member of this family is the Northern Bottlenose Whale, which occurs along the edge of the continental shelf from Davis Strait to the Scotian shelf. A habitat suitability model indicates that the area from the nose of the Banks, Orphan Basin to Flemish Pass and Flemish Cap are particularly important for this species. The species is commonly reported in Div. 3L (SCR Doc. 20/023).

There are considerable data available on the movements of harp and hooded seals based on satellite telemetry studies. Both species feed in the NRA prior to and after the pupping period in March. Harp seals utilize the continental shelf, particularly the nose of the Grand Bank, while hooded seals are common along the slope edges of the Flemish Pass and Flemish Cap. These are important feeding areas for both species.

Harp seals are the most abundant marine mammal in the North Atlantic. After two decades of being relatively stable, the Northwest Atlantic population is currently estimated to have increased over the past five years to 7.6 million. Hooded seals were last assessed in 2006 at 587 000. Less is known about abundance of cetaceans; only two large scale surveys have been carried out that covered the entirety of Canadian Atlantic waters, one in 2007 and the other in 2016. The estimates of abundance of the main species varied among surveys and could not be accounted for by population growth, suggesting a change in distribution from the earlier to the later survey. In 2016, abundance of minke whales, humpback whales and fin whales in Newfoundland and Labrador waters were estimated to be 12 000, 8400 and 2200, respectively. The most abundant cetacean was white-beaked dolphins (530 500). Because of the lack of long-term data, trends in abundance of almost all of the cetacean species are unknown.

Three species of sea turtles, loggerhead, green and leatherback, have been reported in the NRA. However, only leatherback turtles occur regularly. They migrate from South America to feed on jellyfish in the NCA each year and occur in the Northwest Atlantic primarily during the late summer and early fall when water temperatures reach a maximum. A habitat suitability model based on data from the 2016 megafauna survey did not extend to the NRA but indicated that suitable habitat for leatherback turtles extended across the Grand Bank to both the nose and tail.

Many of the species included in this summary have been reported caught in fishing gear in the NRA and the Convention Area but bycatch rates are unknown.

Data on the presence of seabirds in the NRA can also be obtained from scientific survey, opportunistic sightings, acoustic recorders and satellite telemetry studies and also from bycatch reporting and light-level geolocators. There are not many dedicated surveys conducted in the NRA specifically for seabirds and most visual surveying is done terrestrially on nesting sites or nearshore habitats. There are some opportunistic and citizen science reporting of seabirds in coastal waters, including the NRA, but these data are sparse and have limited use beyond determining presence/absence.

The summer seabird community and the distribution of seabirds in the Flemish Cap (Div. 3M) were described by Leyenda and Munilla (2002), based on data from EU groundfish surveys. Eight species were counted within census transects. Over 70% of seabirds were great shearwaters (*Ardenna gravis*), followed by northern fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) with 17.1% of the seabirds recorded. Seabird abundance and seabird species richness were not evenly distributed across the Flemish Cap but seemed to concentrate at the edges of the southern half of the study area. Both species are also the most frequent seabirds reported in the Flemish Pass (Div. 3L) by the Spanish groundfish surveys (2012-2019), although abundance is not recorded on this survey platform (SCR Doc. 20/023). On the Flemish Pass survey, 13 seabird species were sighted.

A majority of the information available on the seabird species using the NRA comes from light-level geolocators or other small, lightweight tags allowing bird migrations to be recorded. There is an abundance of seabird tracking studies conducted in the Atlantic that indicate the NRA is being used by seabirds. These studies are helping to delineate seabird species' seasonal use patterns, migration routes and time spent at sea.

Seabirds can be highly migratory and travel great distances between foraging and nesting areas; for example, the Arctic Tern migrates between Arctic and Antarctic waters. As such, a majority of the species found in the NRA are only in the area seasonally; however, some species are found in the area year-round.

An initial literature review indicates a total of 58 species have been found to use the NCA and, of those, 31 species have more specific geographic data that indicates they use the NRA. Families Laridae (terns and gulls), Procellariidae (petrels and shearwaters), Stercorariidae (skuas and jaegers) and Alcidae (puffins and murres) make up 27 of the 31 species observed in the NRA (Table xvi.1).

Table xvi.1. Seabirds known to use the NAFO regulatory area (NRA) grouped by Family.

Common name	***Latin name***	**Family**
Atlantic puffin	*Fratercula arctica*	Alcidae
Common murre	*Uria aalge*	Alcidae
Dovekies (little auks)	*Alle alle*	Alcidae
Thick-billed murre	*Uria lomvia*	Alcidae
Arctic tern	*Sterna paradisaea*	Laridae
Black-legged kittiwake	*Rissa tridactyla*	Laridae
Common tern	*Sterna hirundo*	Laridae
Glaucous gull	*Larus hyperboreus*	Laridae
Great black-backed gull	*Larus marinus*	Laridae
Lesser black-backed gull	*Larus fuscus*	Laridae
Ivory gull	*Pagophila eburnea*	Laridae
Iceland gull	*Larus glaucoides*	Laridae
Sabine's gull	*Xema sabini*	Laridae
Red-necked phalarope	*Phalaropus lobatus*	Scolopacidae
Great skua	*Stercorarius skua*	Stercorariidae
Long-tailed jaeger (skua)	*Stercorarius longicaudus*	Stercorariidae
Parasitic jaeger	*Stercorarius parasiticus*	Stercorariidae
Pomarine jaeger	*Stercorarius pomarinus*	Stercorariidae
South polar skua	*Stercorarius maccormicki*	Stercorariidae
Leach's storm-petrel	*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*	Hydrobatidae
Bermuda petrel	*Pterodroma cahow*	Procellariidae
Black-capped petrel	*Pterodroma hasitata*	Procellariidae
Cory's shearwater	*Calonectriz diomedea*	Procellariidae
Desertas petrel	*Pterodroma deserta*	Procellariidae
Great shearwater	*Ardenna gravis*	Procellariidae
Manx shearwater	*Puffinus puffinus*	Procellariidae
Northern fulmar	*Fulmarus glacialis*	Procellariidae
Sooty shearwater	*Ardenna grisea*	Procellariidae
Trindade petrel	*Pterodroma arminjoniana*	Procellariidae
Wilson's storm petrel	*Oceanites oceanicus*	Oceanitidae
Northern gannet	*Morus bassanus*	Sulidae

References:

Leyenda, P. M., and I. M. Rumbao. (2005). The summer seabird community of the Flemish Cap in 2002. J. Northw. Atl. Fish. Sci., 37: 47-52. doi:10.2960/J.v37.m554

Román-Marcote, E., Durán Muñoz, P. and Sacau, M. (2019). Preliminary information from EU-Spain regarding Commision request #18. Oral presentation. 12th NAFO Working Group on Ecosystem Science Assessment. 18-28 November 2019. NAFO headquarters. Dartmouth. Canada.

xvii) Request #18: Ecosystem summary sheets for 3M and 3LNO & joint workshop with ICES

The Commission requests that the Scientific Council proceed with developing the ecosystem summary sheets for 3M and 3LNO move toward undertaking a joint Workshop with ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) as part of a peer review of North Atlantic ecosystems.

Scientific Council responded:

Owing to demands to complete Commission Request 6 (assessment of Significant Adverse Impacts of fishing activities on VMEs) via short virtual meetings, development of Ecosystem Summary Sheets for 3M could not yet be completed by SC. Development of the Ecosystem Summary Sheet for 3M will resume in 2021. The Ecosystem summary sheet for 3LNO was completed in 2019.

As a result of pandemic related limitations, undertaking a joint Workshop with ICES has been postponed until there is a greater likelihood of face-to-face meetings. Planning for a collaborative workshop will resume in 2021-2022. The process will benefit from NAFO's internal WG-EAFFM dialogue session on the Roadmap in late 2021 to further clarify concepts and ideas in preparation for the full WG-EAFFM Roadmap Workshop, currently scheduled as a face-to-face meeting in 2022.

2. Coastal States

a) Request by Denmark (on behalf of Greenland) for Advice on TACs and Other Management in 2022 of certain stocks in Subareas 0 and 1 (Annex 2)

i) Monitoring of Stocks for which Multi-year Advice was provided in 2019 or 2020

Interim monitoring updates of these stocks were conducted and Scientific Council reiterates its previous advice as follows:

Recommendation for Demersal redfish in Subarea 1 for 2021 – 2023: Deep-sea redfish and Golden redfish: The Scientific Council advises that there should be no directed fishery.

There will be no new assessment until monitoring shows that conditions have changed; until then, the advice given above will remain.

Recommendation for Wolffish in Subarea 1 for 2021 – 2023: Atlantic wolffish: The Scientific Council advises that there should be no directed fishery. **Spotted wolffish:** The Scientific Council advises that the TAC should not exceed 1158 tonnes.

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Division 1A inshore - Upernavik for 2021 – 2022: Scientific Council recommends that catch should not exceed 5068 tonnes. This is a reduction over the previous advice accounting for the reduction in mean individual size in the recent catches

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Division 1A inshore - Uummannaq for 2021 – 2022: Scientific Council recommends that catch should not exceed 5153 tonnes. This recommendation is a reduction over the previous advice accounting for the decrease in the mean size in the recent catches.

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Division 1A inshore - Disko Bay for 2021 – 2022: The Scientific Council advises that the TAC should not exceed 4346 tonnes.

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Subarea 1 Division 1BC inshore for 2021 – 2022: The Scientific Council recommends that catch in each of the years 2021 and 2022 should not exceed 300 tonnes, which corresponds to the Depletion Corrected Average Catch (DCAC).

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Subarea 1 Division 1D inshore for 2021 – 2022: The Scientific council recommends a reduction of catches in this area to reach the 398 tonnes, corresponding to the Depletion Corrected Average Catch (DCAC), by 2023. The SC recommends to reduce catches to 647 tonnes in 2021 and 522 tonnes in 2022.

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Subarea 1 Division 1EF inshore for 2021 – 2022: The Scientific Council recommends a reduction of catches in this area to reach 222 tonnes, corresponding to the Depletion Corrected Average Catch (DCAC), over a period of three years (2021-2023).

Recommendation for Greenland halibut in Subarea 0+1 (offshore) for 2021 – 2022: Scientific Council advises that there is a low risk of Greenland halibut in Subarea 0 + 1 being below B_{lim} if the TAC for 2021 and 2022 remains at 36 370 tonnes.

This year, for the first time, this catch advice is exclusive of catches taken in the inshore areas of Divisions 1B-F, for which separate advice is provided.

There is no scientific basis with which to provide separate advice for the offshore areas of Div. 0A+1AB and Div. 0B+1C-F. The SC advises that consideration be given to the distribution of effort in each area to avoid localized depletion.

3. Scientific Council Advice of its own accord

Scientific Council did not provide any advice of its own accord in 2021.

VIII. REVIEW OF FUTURE MEETINGS ARRANGEMENTS

1. Scientific Council meetings

a) Scientific Council (in conjunction with NIPAG) September 2021

Scientific Council (in conjunction with NIPAG) will meet by WebEx during 8-14 September 2021 (however, it is noted that some change in these dates may occur) to provide advice for northern shrimp in Division 3M, northern shrimp in Divisions 3LNO and northern shrimp in Subarea 1 and Div. 0A. There will be an additional NIPAG meeting by Webex in November 2021 to assess northern shrimp in Denmark Strait and off East Greenland.

b) Scientific Council, 17 August 2021

Scientific Council may hold an additional 1 day meeting on 17 August 2021 to update the advice on the review of the NAFO PA Framework (see response to Commission Request #8, earlier in this report). This will be contingent on further progress by PA-WG.

c) Scientific Council, September 2021

The Annual Meeting will be held by WebEx from 21 to 25 September 2021,

d) WG-ESA, 16- 25 November 2021

The Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA) will meet at the NAFO Secretariat, Nova Scotia, Canada, from 16 to 25 November 2021.

e) Scientific Council, June 2022

Scientific Council June 2022 meeting will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, from 3 to 16 June 2022.

f) Scientific Council (in conjunction with NIPAG), 2022

Dates and location to be determined.

g) Scientific Council, September 2022

The Annual meeting will be held in September in Halifax, Nova Scotia, unless an invitation to host the meeting is extended by a Contracting Party.

2. NAFO/ICES Joint Groups

a) NIPAG, 8-14 September 2021

The joint NAFO/ICES *Pandalus* Assessment Group will meet by WebEx during 8-14 September 2021 (however, it is noted that some change in these dates may occur).

b) ICES – NAFO Working Group on Deep-water Ecosystem, 2022

Dates and location to be determined.

c) Joint ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WG-HARP) 2021

Dates and location to be determined.

3. Commission- Scientific Council Joint Working Groups

a) WG-RBMS August 2021

The joint SC-Commission Working Group on Risk Based Management Systems (WG-RBMS) will be held via WebEx on 24-26 August 2021.

b) WG-EAFFM July 2021

The joint SC-Commission Working Group on the Ecosystem approach to Fisheries Management (WG-EAFFM) will be held via WebEx on 14-16 and 20-21 July 2021.

c) CESAG

The next meeting of the Catch Estimation Strategy Advisory Group (CESAG) will be in February 2022 via WebEx.

IX. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SPECIAL SESSIONS

1. Topics of Future Special Sessions

The Chair and participants of STACFEN reminded SC members of the upcoming "4th Symposium on Decadal Variability of the North Atlantic and its' Marine Ecosystem: 2010-2019", taking place 26-28 April 2022 in Bergen, Norway, hosted by the Institute of Marine Research (IMR). The symposium is jointly organized by ICES, NAFO and IMR, and its webpage can be found in

https://decadal2022.imr.no/registration-and-abstract-submission

X. MEETING REPORTS

1. Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA) - SCS Doc. 20/23

The report of the meeting of the Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA) held 17-26 November 2020 by WebEx was presented by its co-Chairs Pierre Pepin (Canada) and Andrew Kenny (UK).

2. ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WG-HARP)

SC will aim to get an update for September.

XI. REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL WORKING PROCEDURES/PROTOCOL

a) General plan of work for September:

SC did not hold any discussion specifically on this during the June meeting, since it has managed to address all Commission requests (with the only exception of Request #3).

XII. OTHER MATTERS

1. Designated Experts

The list of current Designated Experts can be found below and will be reviewed by SC in September.

From the Science Branch, Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Centre, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

Cod in Div. 3NO	Rick Rideout	rick.rideout@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Redfish Div. 3O	Danny Ings	danny.ings@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
American Plaice in Div. 3LNO	Laura Wheeland	laura.wheeland@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Witch flounder in Div. 3NO	Dawn Maddock Parsons	dawn.parsons@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Yellowtail flounder in Div. 3LNO	Dawn Maddock Parsons	dawn.parsons@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Greenland halibut in SA 2+3KLMNO	Paul Regular	paul.regular@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Northern shrimp in Div. 3LNO	Katherine Skanes	katherine.skanes@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Thorny skate in Div. 3LNO	Mark Simpson	mark.r.simpson@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
White hake in Div. 3NO	Mark Simpson	mark.r.simpson@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Greenland halibut in SA 0+1	Margaret Treble	margaret.treble@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

From the Instituto Español de Oceanografia, Vigo (Pontevedra), Spain

Roughhead grenadier in SA 2+3	Fernando Gonzalez-Costas	fernando.gonzalez@ieo.es
Splendid alfonsino in Subarea 6	Fernando Gonzalez-Costas	fernando.gonzalez@ieo.es
Cod in Div. 3M	Diana Gonzalez-Troncoso	diana.gonzalez@ieo.es
Shrimp in Div. 3M	Jose Miguel Casas Sanchez	mikel.casas@ieo.es

From the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Biológicos (INRB/IPMA), Lisbon, Portugal

American plaice in Div. 3M	Ricardo Alpoim	ralpoim@ipma.pt
Golden redfish in Div. 3M	Ricardo Alpoim	ralpoim@ipma.pt
Redfish in Div. 3M	Ricardo Alpoim (provisional)	ralpoim@ipma.pt
Redfish in Div. 3LN	Ricardo Alpoim (provisional)	ralpoim@ipma.pt

From the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, Nuuk, Greenland

Redfish in SA1	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Other Finfish in SA1	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Greenland halibut in Div. 1A inshore	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Greenland halibut in Div. 1BC inshore	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Greenland halibut in Div. 1D inshore	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Greenland halibut in Div. 1EF inshore	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Northern shrimp in SA 0+1	AnnDorte Burmeister	anndorte@natur.gl
Northern shrimp in Denmark Strait	Frank Rigét	frri@natur.gl

From Knipovich Polar Research Institute of Marine Fisheries and Oceanography (PINRO), Russian Federation

Capelin in Div. 3NO	Konstantin Fomin	fomin@pinro.ru

From National Marine Fisheries Service, NEFSC, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, United States of America

Northern Shortfin Squid in SA 3 & 4	Lisa Hendrickson	lisa.hendrickson@noaa.gov

2. Election of Chairs

Scientific Council has elected the following chairs for the period October 2021 – September 2023:

Scientific Council Chair:	Karen Dwyer (Canada)
STACREC Chair (and SC vice-Chair):	Diana González-Troncoso (EU)
STACFIS Chair:	Mark Simpson (Canada)
STACPUB Chair:	Rick Rideout (Canada)
STACFEN Chair:	Miguel Caetano (EU)

3. Budget items

The proposed Scientific Council budget including requests for 2022 was submitted to the scientific council as SCWP 21/003. The SC chair requested that SC members read the Working Paper and provide comments during the course of the meeting. No comments were received, and the proposed budget was therefore considered to have been approved by SC.

4. Proposed MoU with the Sargasso Sea Commission

The NAFO Secretariat has been approached by the Secretariat of the Sargasso Sea Commission (SSSC) about the possibility of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two Secretariats. A draft text of a proposed MOU was made available to Scientific Council as SCWP 21/001 and presented by the Executive Secretary. The NAFO Secretariat seeks the advice of Scientific Council as to whether NAFO should in principle respond positively to this initiative of the SSSC. If so, the Secretariat would appreciate the advice of SC as to suggestions to improve the draft text. The Secretariat notes that the current areas of collaboration proposed by the SSSC focus on marine scientific research and the collection of data, which would be of particular relevance for the NAFO Scientific Council.

SC agreed that the MoU would be a useful initiative. SC members made a number of comments as follows:

- *The text is rather non-committal and vague in relation to common measures and initiatives, particularly in relation to seamount closures close to the boundary of the NRA.*
- *The scope of the text needs to be broadened (particularly in clause 2b) to include reference to marine ecosystems as well as marine species.*
- *The text needs to be changed to include the UK as a NAFO Contracting Party.*

The NAFO Executive Secretary invited the SC participants to provide him with written comments to forward to the SSSC after it has been further considered by WG-EAFFM.

5. Other Business

No other business was considered.

XIII. ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE REPORTS

The limitations of meeting by correspondence implied that the reports of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Science (STACFIS) could only be formally adopted by correspondence later in the month of June. The adopted report is included as Appendix IV.

The reports of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Environment (STACFEN) and the Standing Committee on Research Coordination (STACREC) and the Standing Committee on Publications (STACPUB) were deferred until September.

XIV. SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION

The Council Chair undertook to address the recommendations from this meeting and to submit relevant ones to the Commission.

XV. ADOPTION OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL REPORT

At its concluding session on 11 June 2021, the Council considered the draft report of this meeting, and adopted the report. The usual understanding that the report remains in draft form for about two weeks, and that during this period the Chair and the Secretariat may incorporate minor edits (after proof-reading) on the usual strict understanding there should be no substantive changes, is applied.

XVI. ADJOURNMENT

The Chair thanked the participants for their hard work and cooperation, noting the particularly difficult circumstances of this year's meeting. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for their valuable support. There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 13:00 on 11 June 2021.

APPENDIX I. REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES ENVIRONMENT (STACFEN)

The report of STACFEN was deferred to September.

APPENDIX II. REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS (STACPUB)

The report of STACPUB was deferred to September.

APPENDIX III. REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH COORDINATION (STACREC)

The report of STACREC was deferred to September.

APPENDIX IV. REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES SCIENCE (STACFIS)

The report of STACFIS is expected to become available during July 2021.

APPENDIX V. AGENDA - SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEETING, 27 MAY-11 JUNE 2021

(By correspondence and videoconference)

The meeting will be held from Monday to Friday. Weekends will not be working days.

Note:

- For STACFEN, STACPUB and STACREC (items III, IV and V below), the Committee Chairs will produce a draft of the report offline and upload it to the Scientific Council SharePoint, either in June or September, depending on workload. Scientific Council will be informed and given the opportunity to comment before the approval of these reports.
- The same working procedure will be applied to some of the STACFIS and Scientific Council items. All stock assessments and other scientific work directly used in responding to this year's requests for advice will be presented in plenary sessions by WebEx.

I. Opening (Scientific Council Chair: Carmen Fernández)
  1. Appointment of Rapporteur
  2 Presentation and Report of Proxy Votes
  3. Adoption of Agenda
  4. Attendance of Observers
  5. Appointment of Designated Experts
  6. Plan of Work
  7. Housekeeping issues

II. Review of Scientific Council Recommendations in 2020

III. Fisheries Environment (STACFEN Chair: Miguel Caetano)
  1. Opening
  2. Appointment of Rapporteur
  3. Adoption of Agenda
  4. Review of Recommendations in 2020
  5. Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Oceans Science Branch, Marine Environmental Data Section (MEDS) Report for 2020
  6. Review of the physical, biological and chemical environment in the NAFO Convention Area during 2020
  8. Formulation of recommendations based on environmental conditions during 2020
  9. Other Matters
  10. Adjournment

IV. Publications (STACPUB Chair: Margaret Treble)
  1. Opening
  2. Appointment of Rapporteur
  3. Adoption of Agenda
  4. Review of Recommendations in 2020
  5. Review of Publications
    a) Annual Summary
      i) Journal of Northwest Atlantic Fishery Science (JNAFS)
      ii) Scientific Council Studies
      iii) Scientific Council Reports
  6. Other Matters

7. Adjournment

V. Research Coordination (STACREC Chair: Karen Dwyer)
  1. Opening
  2. Appointment of Rapporteur
  3. Review of Recommendations in 2020
  4. Fishery Statistics
    a) Progress report on Secretariat activities in 2020/2021
      i) Presentation of catch estimates from the CESAG, daily catch reports and STATLANT 21A and 21B
  5. Research Activities
    a) Biological sampling
      i) Report on activities in 2020/2021
      ii) Report by National Representatives on commercial sampling conducted
      iii) Report on data availability for stock assessments (by Designated Experts)
    b) Biological surveys
      i) Review of survey activities in 2020 and early 2021 (by National Representatives and Designated Experts)
      ii) Surveys planned for 2021 and early 2022
    c) Tagging activities
    d) Other research activities
  6. Review of SCR and SCS Documents
  7. Other Matters
    a) Summary of progress on previous recommendations
    b) NAFO Catch Estimates Methodology Study
  8. Adjournment

VI. Fisheries Science (STACFIS Chair: Kathy Sosebee)
  I. Opening
  II. General Review of Catches and Fishing Activity
  III. Stock Assessments
    1. Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) in SA 0+1 offshore (monitor)
    2. Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) Div. 1A inshore Divs. 1BC inshore, Div. 1D inshore and Divs. 1EF inshore (monitor)
    3. Demersal Redfish and deep-sea redfish (*Sebastes* spp.) in SA 1 (monitor)
    4. Wolffish in SA 1 (monitor)
    5. Golden redfish (*Sebastes norvegicus* aka *S. marinus*) in Div. 3M (monitor)
    6. Cod (*Gadus morhua*) in Div. 3M (full assessment)
    7. Redfish (*Sebastes mentella* and *Sebastes fasciatus*) in Div. 3M (full assessment)
    8. American plaice (*Hippoglossoides platessoides*) in Div. 3M (monitor)
    9. Cod (*Gadus morhua*) in Divs. 3NO (full assessment)
    10. Redfish (*Sebastes mentella* and *Sebastes fasciatus*) in Divs. 3L and 3N (monitor)
    11. American plaice (*Hippoglossoides platessoides*) in Divs. 3LNO (full assessment)
    12. Yellowtail flounder (*Limanda ferruginea*) in Divs. 3LNO (full assessment)
    13. Witch flounder (*Glyptocephalus cynoglossus*) in Divs. 3NO (monitor)
    14. Capelin (*Mallotus villosus*) in Divs. 3NO (full assessment)
    15. Redfish (Sebastes mentella and Sebastes fasciatus) in Div. 3O (monitor)
    16. Thorny skate (*Amblyraja radiata*) in Divs. 3LNO and Subdiv. 3PS (monitor)

17. White hake (*Urophycis tenuis*) in Divs. 3NO and Subdiv. 3PS (full assessment)
18. Roughhead grenadier (*Macrourus berglax*) in SA 2 and 3 (monitor)
19. Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) in SA 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO (under management strategy: (monitor, COM request #2)
20. Northern shortfin squid (*Illex illecebrosus*) in SA 3+4 (monitor)
21. Splendid alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*) in SA 6 (monitor)

IV. Other Matters
   a) FIRMS Classification for NAFO Stocks (Note: expected to be deferred to September)
   b) Other Business
V. Adjournment

VII. Management Advice and Responses to Special Requests (See Annex 1)

Because of the difficulties caused by the online meeting format, it may not be possible to address all the requests during the June meeting. The following priority order will be applied to the requests:

Priority level	**Schedule for SC addressing the request**
1	June
2	June (but could be delayed to September if no time in June – to be decided during the June meeting, depending on progress)

1. NAFO Commission (Annex 1)
   a) Request for Advice on TACs and Other Management Measures (request #1, Annex 1)
   [Priority level 1 for all of them]
      For 2022
      - Cod in Div. 3M
      For 2022 and 2023
      - Redfish in Div. 3M
      - White hake in Divs. 3NO
      For 2022, 2023 and 2024
      - American Plaice in Divs. 3LNO
      - Capelin in Divs. 3NO
      - Cod in Divs. 3NO
      - Yellowtail Flounder in Divs. 3LNO

   b) Monitoring of Stocks for which Multi-year Advice was provided in 2019 or 2020 (request #1)
   [Priority level 1 for all of them, except squid which is for September]
      - American plaice in Div. 3M
      - Redfish in Divs. 3LN
      - Witch flounder in Divs. 3NO
      - Redfish in Divs. 3O
      - Thorny skate in Divs. 3LNO and Subdiv. 3PS
      - Greenland halibut in SA 2 + Divs. 3KLMNO
      - Alfonsino stocks in the NAFO Regulatory Area
      - Roughhead grenadier in SA 2 and 3

- Northern shortfin squid (*Illex illecebrosus*) in SA 3+4 [note: to be done in September]

c) Special Requests for Management Advice
    Request #2 [Priority level 1]: Greenland halibut in SA2 + Divs. 3KLMNO: monitor, compute the TAC using the agreed HCR and determine whether exceptional circumstances are occurring
    Request #3 [Priority level 1]: Continue the evaluation of scientific trawl surveys in VME closed areas and the effect on stock assessments of excluding the surveys from these areas
    Request #4 [Priority level 1]: Implement the steps of the bycatch and discards action plan relevant to SC: Task 2.2 (already responded to in September 2020 SC report); Tasks 3.1 and 3.2 for June 2021.
    Request #5 [Priority level 2]: Continue to refine work on the Ecosystem Roadmap
    Request #6 [Priority level 1]: Re-assessment of NAFO bottom fisheries in 2021
    Request #7 [Priority level 2]: Review the proposed revisions to Annex I.E, Part VI
    Request #8 [Priority level 1]: Continue progress on the NAFO PA Framework review
    Request #9 [Priority level 1]: Identify areas and times where bycatch and discards of Greenland sharks have a higher rate of occurrence
    Request #10 [Priority level 2]: Continue to develop a 3-5 year work plan
    Request #11 [Priority level 1]: Scoping exercise for 3LN redfish MSE
    Request #12 [Priority level 1]: Review submitted protocols for a survey methodology to inform the assessment of splendid alfonsino
    Request #13 [Priority level 2]: Presentation of the stock assessment and the scientific advice of Cod 2J3KL (Canada), Witch 2J3KL (Canada) and *Pelagic Sebastes mentella* (ICES Divisions V, XII and XIV; NAFO 1)
    Request #14 [Priority level 1]: Conduct ongoing analysis of the Flemish Cap cod fishery data by 2022
    Request #15 [Priority level 1]: Consider whether other measures, such as depth restrictions, spatial and mesh changes, could reduce the catch of juvenile and immature cod across all fisheries in 3M
    Request #16 [Priority level 2]: Provide updates on relevant research related to the potential impact of activities other than fishing in the Convention Area & work with other organizations (FAO, ICES…) to bring in additional expertise to inform SC's work
    Request #17 [Priority level 2]: Information on sea turtles, sea birds, and marine mammals that are present in NAFO Regulatory Area
    Request #18 [Priority level 2]: Ecosystem summary sheets for 3M and 3LNO & move toward joint workshop with ICES

2. Coastal States
    a) Request by Denmark (Greenland) for Advice on Management in 2022 (Annex 2)
        None: requests for advice on Management in 2022 were for monitoring only

    b) Request by Canada and Denmark (Greenland) for Advice on Management in 2022 (Annex 2, Annex 3)
        None: requests for advice on Management in 2022 were for monitoring only

VIII. Review of Future Meetings Arrangements
1. Scientific Council (in conjunction with NIPAG), 8 to 14 Sep. 2021
2. Scientific Council, 20 – 24 Sep. 2021
3. WG-ESA, Nov. 2021
4. Scientific Council, June 2022

5. Scientific Council (in conjunction with NIPAG), 2022
6. Scientific Council, Sep. 2022
7. WG-ESA, Nov. 2022
8. NAFO/ICES Joint Groups
   a) NIPAG, 2021
   b) NIPAG, 2022
   c) WG-DEC
   d) WG-HARP

IX. Arrangements for Special Sessions
   1. Topics for future Special Sessions (Note: expected to be deferred to September)

X. Meeting Reports (Note: some may be deferred to September)
   1. Working Group on Ecosystem Science and Assessment (WG-ESA), Nov. 2020
   2. Report from ICES-NAFO Working Group on Deepwater Ecosystems (WG-DEC), 2020
   3. Report from Joint COM-SC Working Group on Catch Estimation Strategy Advisory Group (CESAG), March and April 2020
   4. Meetings attended by the Secretariat

XI. Review of Scientific Council Working Procedures/Protocol
   1. General Plan of Work for September 2021 Annual Meeting
   2. Priority actions for Scientific Council from the Performance Review Panel WG (adopted by the NAFO Commission in September 2019):
      - peer review process for the science underlying the SC advice, applied consistently to all SC science used in advice [note: to be discussed by SC in June if time permits, otherwise in September]

XII. Other Matters
   1. Designated Experts
   2. Election of Chairs
   3. Budget items
   4. Proposed MoU with the Sargasso Sea Commission
   5. Other Business

XIII. Adoption of Committee Reports
   1. STACFEN
   2. STACREC
   3. STACPUB
   4. STACFIS

XIV. Scientific Council Recommendations to Commission

XV. Adoption of Scientific Council Report

XVI. Adjournment

ANNEX 1. COMMISSION'S REQUEST FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVICE ON MANAGEMENT IN 2022 AND BEYOND OF CERTAIN STOCKS IN SUBAREAS 2, 3 AND 4 AND OTHER MATTERS

(from SCS Doc. 21/01)

Following a request from the Scientific Council, the Commission agreed that items 1, 2, 8 and 11 should be the priority for the June 2021 Scientific Council meeting subject to resources and COVID-related restrictions.

1. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council provide advice for the management of the fish stocks below according to the assessment frequency presented below. In keeping with the NAFO Precautionary Approach Framework (FC Doc. 04-18), the advice should be provided as a range of management options and a risk analysis for each option without a single TAC recommendation. The Commission will decide upon the acceptable risk level in the context of the entirety of the SC advice for each stock guided and as foreseen by the Precautionary Approach.

Yearly basis	**Two-year basis**	**Three-year basis**
Cod in Div. 3M Northern shrimp in Div. 3M	Redfish in Div. 3M Northern shrimp in Div. 3LNO Thorny skate in Div. 3LNO Witch flounder in Div. 3NO Redfish in Div. 3LN White hake in Div. 3NO	American Plaice in Div. 3LNO American Plaice in Div. 3M Capelin in Div. 3NO Northern shortfin squid in SA 3+4 Redfish in Div. 3O Yellowtail flounder in Div. 3LNO Cod in Div. 3NO

To implement this schedule of assessments, the Scientific Council is requested to conduct a full assessment of these stocks as follows:

In 2021, advice should be provided for 2022 for Cod in Div. 3M and Northern shrimp in Div. 3M. With respect to Northern shrimp in Div. 3M, SC is requested to provide its advice to the Commission prior to the 2021 Annual Meeting based on the survey data up to and including 2021.

In 2021, advice should be provided for 2022 and 2023 for: Redfish in Div. 3M, Northern shrimp in Div. 3LNO, and White hake in Div. 3NO

In 2021, advice should be provided for 2022, 2023 and 2024 for: American plaice in Div. 3LNO, Capelin in Div. 3NO, Cod in Div. 3NO, Yellowtail flounder in Div. 3LNO

Advice should be provided using the guidance provided in **Annexes A or B as appropriate**, or using the predetermined Harvest Control Rules in the cases where they exist (currently Greenland halibut 2+3KLMNO).

The Commission also requests the Scientific Council to continue to monitor the status of all other stocks annually and, should a significant change be observed in stock status (e.g. from surveys) or in bycatch in other fisheries, provide updated advice as appropriate.

2. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to monitor the status of Greenland halibut in Subarea 2+Div. 3KLMNO annually to compute the TAC using the agreed HCR and determine whether exceptional circumstances are occurring. If exceptional circumstances are occurring, the exceptional circumstances protocol will provide guidance on what steps should be taken.

3. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council continue its evaluation of the impact of scientific trawl surveys on VME in closed areas, and the effect of excluding surveys from these areas on stock assessments.

4. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to implement the steps of the Action plan relevant to the Scientific Council and in particular the tasks identified under section 2.2 of the Action Plan, for progression in the management and minimization of Bycatch and discards (COM Doc. 17-26).

    - Tasks outlined in Tasks 3.1 and 3.2 of the NAFO Action Plan in the Management and Minimization of Bycatch and Discards (COM Doc. 17-26).

5. The Commission requests that Scientific Council continue to refine work on the Ecosystem Road Map:

    - Continue to test the reliability of the ecosystem production potential model and other related models

    - Report on these results to WG-EAFFM and WG-RBMS to further develop how it may apply to management decisions

    - Develop options of how ecosystem advice could inform management decisions, an issue which is directly linked to the results of the foreseen EAFM roadmap workshop.

    - Continue its work to develop models that support implementation of Tier 2 of the EAFM Roadmap."

6. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council, in preparation of the re-assessment of NAFO bottom fisheries in 2021 and discussion on VME fishery closures:

    - Assess the overlap of NAFO fisheries with VME to evaluate fishery specific impacts in addition to the cumulative impacts for NRA fisheries;

    - Consider clearer objective ranking processes and options for objective weighting criteria for the overall assessment of significant adverse impacts and the risk of future adverse impacts;

    - Maintain efforts to assess all of the six FAO criteria including the three FAO functional SAI criteria which could not be evaluated in the current assessment.

    - Provide input and analysis of potential management options, with the goal of supporting meaningful and effective discussions between scientists and managers at the 2021 WG-EAFFM meeting;

    - Continue to work on the VME indicator species as listed in Annex IE, Section VI to prepare for the next assessment.

7. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council review the proposed revisions to Annex I.E, Part VI as reflected in COM-SC EAFFM-WP 18-01, for consistency with the taxa list annexed to the VME guide and recommend updates as necessary.

8. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue progression on the review of the NAFO PA Framework in accordance to the PAF review work plan approved in 2020 (NAFO COM-SC Doc. 20-04)

9. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council Work with WG-BDS to identify areas and times where bycatch and discards of Greenland sharks have a higher rate of occurrence in time for consideration by the Commission in 2021 to inform the development of measures to reduce bycatch in the NRA.

10. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue to develop a 3-5 year work plan, which reflects requests arising from the 2020 Annual Meeting, other multi-year stock assessments and other scientific inquiries already planned for the near future. The work plan should identify what resources are necessary to successfully address these issues, gaps in current resources to meet those needs and proposed prioritization by the Scientific Council of upcoming work based on those gaps.

11. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council, carry out a scoping exercise to provide guidance to the WG-RBMS on the process of conducting of a full review/evaluation of the management strategy of Div. 3LN redfish.

12. The Commission requests the Scientific Council review submitted protocols for a survey methodology to inform the assessment of Splendid Alfonsino. The Scientific Council to report on the outcome of this work at next Commission annual meeting.

13. The Commission requests that results from stock assessments and the scientific advice of Cod 2J3KL (Canada), Witch 2J3KL (Canada) and Pelagic Sebastes mentella (ICES Divisions V, XII and XIV; NAFO 1) to be presented to the Scientific Council (SC), and request the SC to prepare a summary of these assessments to be included in its annual report.

14. The Commission requests the Scientific Council, jointly with the Secretariat, to conduct ongoing analysis of the Flemish Cap cod fishery data by 2022 in order to:

    (1) monitor the consequences of the management decisions (including the analysis of the redistribution of the fishing effort along the year and its potential effects on ecosystems, the variation of the cod catch composition in lengths/ages, and the bycatch levels of other fish species, benthos in general, and VME taxa in particular), and

    (2) carry out any additional monitoring that would be required, including Div. 3M cod caught as bycatch in other fisheries during the closed period.

15. The Commission requests the Scientific Council, in its future work, to consider whether other measures, such as depth restrictions, spatial and mesh changes, could reduce the catch of juvenile and immature cod across all fisheries in 3M.

16. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to continue to monitor and provide updates resulting from relevant research related to the potential impact of activities other than fishing in the Convention Area. Further, that the Secretariat and the Scientific Council work with other international organizations, such as the FAO and ICES, to bring in additional expertise to inform the Scientific Council's work.

17. The Commission requests the Scientific Council to provide information to the Commission at its next annual meeting on sea turtles, sea birds, and marine mammals that are present in NAFO Regulatory Area based on available data.

18. The Commission requests that the Scientific Council proceed with developing the ecosystem summary sheets for 3M and 3LNO move toward undertaking a joint Workshop with ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) as part of a peer review of North Atlantic ecosystems.

ANNEX A. Guidance for providing advice on Stocks Assessed with an Analytical Model

The Commission requests the Scientific Council to consider the following in assessing and projecting future stock levels for those stocks listed above. These evaluations should provide the information necessary for the Fisheries Commission to consider the balance between risks and yield levels, in determining its management of these stocks:

1. For stocks assessed with a production model, the advice should include updated time series of:

- Catch and TAC of recent years
- Catch to relative biomass
- Relative Biomass
- Relative Fishing mortality
- Stock trajectory against reference points
- And any information the Scientific Council deems appropriate.

Stochastic short-term projections (3 years) should be performed with the following constant fishing mortality levels as appropriate:

- For stocks opened to direct fishing: 2/3 F_{msy}, 3/4 F_{msy}, 85% F_{msy}, 90% F_{msy},95% F_{msy}, F_{msy} 0.75 X $F_{status\ quo}$, $F_{status\ qu}$,1.25 X Status quo, F=0; TAC Status quo, 85% TAC Status quo, 90% TAC Status quo, 95% TAC Status quo
- For stocks under a moratorium to direct fishing: $F_{status\ quo}$, F = 0.

The first year of the projection should assume a catch equal to the agreed TAC for that year.

Results from stochastic short-term projection should include:

- The 10%, 50% and 90% percentiles of the yield, total biomass, spawning stock biomass and exploitable biomass for each year of the projections
- The risks of stock population parameters increasing above or falling below available biomass and fishing mortality reference points. The table indicated below should guide the Scientific Council in presenting the short-term projections.

				Limit reference points														
				$P(F>F_{lim})$			$P(B<B_{lim})$				$P(F>F_{msy})$			$P(B<B_{msy})$				P(B2024 > B2020)
F in 2022 and following years*	Yield 2022 (50%)	Yield 2023 (50%)	Yield 2024 (50%)	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024		2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024		
2/3 Fmsy	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
3/4 Fmsy	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
85% Fmsy	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
90% Fmsy																		
95% Fmsy																		
Fmsy	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
0.75 X Fstatus quo	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
Fstatus quo	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
1.25 X Status quo	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
F=0	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
TAC Status quo																		
85% TAC Status quo																		
90% TAC Status quo																		
95% TAC Status quo																		

2. For stock assessed with an age-structured model, information should be provided on stock size, spawning stock sizes, recruitment prospects, historical fishing mortality. Graphs and/or tables should be provided for all of the following for the longest time-period possible:

- historical yield and fishing mortality;
- spawning stock biomass and recruitment levels;
- Stock trajectory against reference points
- And any information the Scientific Council deems appropriate
  Stochastic short-term projections (3 years) should be performed with the following constant fishing mortality levels as appropriate:
  - For stocks opened to direct fishing: $F_{0.1}$, F_{max}, 2/3 F_{max}, 3/4 F_{max}, 85% F_{max}, 75% $F_{status\ quo}$, $F_{status\ quo}$, 125% $F_{status\ quo}$,
- For stocks under a moratorium to direct fishing: $F_{status\ quo}$, F = 0.

The first year of the projection should assume a catch equal to the agreed TAC for that year.
Results from stochastic short-term projection should include:

- The 10%, 50% and 90% percentiles of the yield, total biomass, spawning stock biomass and exploitable biomass for each year of the projections
- The risks of stock population parameters increasing above or falling below available biomass and fishing mortality reference points. The table indicated below should guide the Scientific Council in presenting the short-term projections.

				Limit reference points														
				$P(F.>F_{lim})$			$P(B<B_{lim})$				P(F>F0.1)			$P(F>F_{max})$				P(B2024 > B2020)
F in 2022 and following years*	Yield 2022	Yield 2023	Yield 2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024		2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024		
F0.1	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
F_{max}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
66% F_{max}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
75% F_{max}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
85% F_{max}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
0.75 X F_{2018}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
F_{2018}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%
1.25 X F_{2018}	t	t	t	%	%	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%		%

ANNEX B. Guidance for providing advice on Stocks Assessed without a Population Model

For those resources for which only general biological and/or catch data are available, few standard criteria exist on which to base advice. The stock status should be evaluated in the context of management requirements for long-term sustainability and the advice provided should be consistent with the precautionary approach.

The following graphs should be presented, for one or several surveys, for the longest time-period possible:

a. time trends of survey abundance estimates
b. an age or size range chosen to represent the spawning population
c. an age or size-range chosen to represent the exploited population
d. recruitment proxy or index for an age or size-range chosen to represent the recruiting population.
e. fishing mortality proxy, such as the ratio of reported commercial catches to a measure of the exploited population.
f. Stock trajectory against reference points

And any information the Scientific Council deems appropriate.

ANNEX 2. DENMARK (ON BEHALF OF GREENLAND) REQUESTS FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVICE ON MANAGEMENT IN 2022 AND BEYOND OF CERTAIN STOCKS IN SUBAREA 0 AND 1

(from SCS Doc. 21/02)

Denmark (on behalf of Greenland) requests scientific advice on management in 2020 of Certain Stocks in NAFO Subarea 0 and 1. Denmark (on behalf of Greenland) requests the Scientific Council for advice on the following species:

1. **Golden Redfish, Demersal Deep-Sea Redfish, Atlantic Wolffish and Spotted Wolffish**
   Advice on Golden Redfish (*Sebastes marinus*), Demersal Deep-Sea Redfish (*Sebastes mentella*), Atlantic Wolffish (*Anarhichas lupus*) and Spotted Wolffish (*Anarhichas minor*) in Subarea 1 was in June 2020 given for 2021-2023. Consequently, the Scientific Council is requested to continue its monitoring of the above stocks and provide updated advice as appropriate in the event of significant changes in stock levels.

2. **Greenland Halibut, Offshore**
   Advice on Greenland Halibut, Offshore in Subareas 0 and 1 was in 2020 given for 2021 and 2022. Consequently, the Scientific Council is requested to continue its monitoring of the above stocks and provide updated advice as appropriate in the event of significant changes in stock levels. The Scientific Council is also asked to advice on any other management measures it deems appropriate to ensure the sustainability of these resources.

3. **Greenland Halibut, Inshore, West Greenland**
   Advice on Greenland Halibut in Division 1A inshore, Division 1BC inshore, Division 1D inshore and Division 1EF inshore was in 2020 given for 2021-2022. Consequently, the Scientific Council is requested to continue its monitoring of the above stocks and provide updated advice as appropriate in the event of significant changes in stock levels. The Scientific Council is also asked to advice on any other management measures it deems appropriate to ensure the sustainability of these resources.

4. **Northern Shrimp, West Greenland**
   Subject to the concurrence of Canada as regards to Subareas 0 and 1, Denmark (on behalf of Greenland) requests the Scientific Council before December 2021 to provide advice on the scientific basis for management of Northern Shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) in Subareas 0 and 1 in 2022 in line with Greenland's stated management objective of maintaining a mortality risk of no more than 35% in the first year prediction and to provide a catch option table ranging with 5000 t increments. Future catch options should be provided for as many years as data allows for. Furthermore, Scientific Council is requested to provide a catch level corresponding to a mortality risk of exact 35% in the first year of prediction.

5. **Northern Shrimp, East Greenland**
   Furthermore, the Scientific Council is in cooperation with ICES requested to provide advice on the scientific basis for management of Northern Shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) in Denmark Strait and adjacent waters east of southern Greenland in 2022 and for as many years ahead as data allows for.

ANNEX 3. REQUESTS FROM CANADA FOR ADVICE ON MANAGEMENT IN 2022 AND BEYOND

(from SCS Doc. 21/03)

1. Greenland halibut (Subarea 0 + 1 (offshore)[31]

Advice on Greenland Halibut in Subareas 0 and 1 was provided in 2020 for 2021 and 2022. Canada requests that the Scientific Council monitor the status of this stock in 2021 and, should a significant change be observed in stock status (e.g. from surveys or in bycatch in other fisheries), provide updated advice as appropriate.

2. Shrimp (Subarea 1 and Division 0A)

Canada requests the Scientific Council to consider the following options in assessing and projecting future stock levels for Shrimp in Subarea 1 and Division 0A:

The status of the stock should be determined and risk-based advice provided for catch options corresponding to Z_{msy}, in 5000-10 000t increments (subject to the discretion of Scientific Council), with forecasts for 2022 to 2024. These options should be evaluated in relation to Canada's Harvest Strategy (attached) and NAFO's Precautionary Approach Framework, and presented in the form of risk analyses related to B_{msy}, 80% B_{msy}, B_{lim} (30% B_{msy}) and Z_{msy}.

Presentation of the results should include graphs and/or tables related to the following:

- Historical and current yield, biomass relative to B_{msy}, total mortality relative to Z_{msy}, and recruitment (or proxy) levels for the longest time period possible;
- Total mortality (Z) and fishable biomass for a range of projected catch options (as noted above) for the years 2022 to 2024. Projections should include both catch options and a range of effective cod predation biomass levels considered appropriate by the Scientific Council. Results should include risk analyses of falling below: B_{msy}, 80% B_{msy} and B_{lim} (30% B_{msy}), and of being above Z_{msy} based on the 3-year projections, consistent with the Harvest Decision Rules in Canada's Harvest Strategy; and
- Total area fished for the longest time period possible.

Please provide the advice relative to Canada's Harvest Strategy as part of the formal advice (i.e., grey box in the advice summary sheet).

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[31] The Scientific Council has noted previously that there is no biological basis for conducting separate assessments for Greenland halibut throughout Subareas 0-3 but has advised that separate TACs be maintained for different areas of the distribution of Greenland halibut.

APPENDIX III. PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE

Scientific Council Meeting, 27 May-11 June 2021 (by correspondence and videoconference)

- The meeting will be held from Monday to Friday. Weekends will not be working days.
- All times below correspond to Halifax times.
- Every day the WebEx connection will be open at 07:30 for participants to join and test connection and sound in advance of an 08:00 start.
- A 20-minute break will be included each day.

Date	Time	Provisional schedule of plenary sessions
27 May (Thurs.)	0800-0815	SC Opening
	0815-0930	STACFEN presentation of key information for SC + discussion
	0930-1010	SC + STACFIS: round the table of status of work and available documents for each stock assessment and all other requests
	1010-1030	Break
	1030-1230	SC: WG-ESA presentation of Request #6 + discussion
28 May (Fri.)	0800-1000	SC: WG-ESA continue Request #6 (if needed)
	1000-1020	Break
	1020-1230	STACFIS (start presentation of stock assessments)
31 May (Mon.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #2 (GHL), #4 (Action Plan Bycatch & Discards) STACFIS
01 June (Tues.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #12 (Alfonsino), #7 (Revisions Annex I.E) STACFIS
02 June (Wed.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #11 (3LN redfish MSE) STACFIS
03 June (Thurs.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #14 & 15 (3M Cod), #16 (Non-fishing), #17 (Sea mammals & birds) STACFIS
04 June (Fri.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #9 (Greenland sharks), #8 (PA-WG) STACFIS
07 June (Mon.)	0800-1230	SC: Requests #3 (surveys in VME closures), #13 (cod, witch, redfish) STACFIS (if needed)
08 June (Tues.)	0800-1230	SC: Request #10 (workplan) SC
09 June (Wed.)	0800-1230	SC
10 June (Thurs.)	0800-1230	SC (including approval of Standing Committee Reports)
11 June (Fri.)	0800-1230	SC

APPENDIX IV. EXPERTS FOR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF CERTAIN STOCKS

Designated Experts for 2021:

From the Science Branch, Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Centre, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

Cod in Div. 3NO	Rick Rideout	rick.rideout@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Redfish Div. 3O	Danny Ings	danny.ings@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
American Plaice in Div. 3LNO	Laura Wheeland	laura.wheeland@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Witch flounder in Div. 3NO	Dawn Maddock Parsons	dawn.parsons@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Yellowtail flounder in Div. 3LNO	Dawn Maddock Parsons	dawn.parsons@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Greenland halibut in SA 2+3KLMNO	Paul Regular	paul.regular@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Northern shrimp in Div. 3LNO	Katherine Skanes	katherine.skanes@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Thorny skate in Div. 3LNO	Mark Simpson	mark.r.simpson@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
White hake in Div. 3NO	Mark Simpson	mark.r.simpson@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Greenland halibut in SA 0+1	Margaret Treble	margaret.treble@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

From the Instituto Español de Oceanografia, Vigo (Pontevedra), Spain

Roughhead grenadier in SA 2+3	Fernando Gonzalez-Costas	fernando.gonzalez@ieo.es
Splendid alfonsino in Subarea 6	Fernando Gonzalez-Costas	fernando.gonzalez@ieo.es
Cod in Div. 3M	Diana Gonzalez-Troncoso	diana.gonzalez@ieo.es
Shrimp in Div. 3M	Jose Miguel Casas Sanchez	mikel.casas@ieo.es

From the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Biológicos (INRB/IPMA), Lisbon, Portugal

American plaice in Div. 3M	Ricardo Alpoim	ralpoim@ipma.pt
Golden redfish in Div. 3M	Ricardo Alpoim	ralpoim@ipma.pt
Redfish in Div. 3M	Vacant from Antonio Avila de Melo	
Redfish in Div. 3LN	Vacant from Antonio Avila de Melo	

From the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, Nuuk, Greenland

Redfish in SA1	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Other Finfish in SA1	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Greenland halibut in Div. 1A	Rasmus Nygaard	rany@natur.gl
Northern shrimp in SA 0+1	AnnDorte Burmeister	anndorte@natur.gl
Northern shrimp in Denmark Strait	Frank Rigét	frri@natur.gl

From Knipovich Polar Research Institute of Marine Fisheries and Oceanography (PINRO), Russian Federation

Capelin in Div. 3NO	Konstantin Fomin	fomin@pinro.ru

From National Marine Fisheries Service, NEFSC, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, United States of America

Northern Shortfin Squid in SA 3 & 4	Lisa Hendrickson	lisa.hendrickson@noaa.gov

APPENDIX VIII. LIST OF SCR AND SCS DOCUMENTS

SCR Documents

Serial No	Doc No.	Author(s)	Title
SCR Doc. 21-001	N7157	G. Søvik and T. H. Thangstad	Norwegian shrimp survey
SCR Doc. 21-002	N7160	John Mortensen	Report on hydrographic conditions off Southwest Greenland May/June 2020
SCR Doc. 21-003	N7163	Heino Fock, Karl-Michael Werner and Christoph Stransky	Survey Results of the German bottom trawl survey 1982-2020 with special reference to years 2016-2019
SCR Doc. 21-004REV.	N7165	R.M. Rideout, D.W. Ings, M. Koen-Alonso	Temporal And Spatial Coverage Of Canadian (Newfoundland And Labrador Region) Spring And Autumn Multi-Species RV Bottom Trawl Surveys, With An Emphasis On Surveys Conducted in 2020
SCR Doc. 21-005	N7166	Diana González Troncoso, Jose Miguel Casas Sánchez and Lupe Ramiro	Results from Bottom Trawl Survey on Flemish Cap of June-July 2020
SCR Doc. 21-006	N7173	Boris Cisewski	Hydrographic conditions off West Greenland in 2020
SCR Doc. 21-007	N7174	Di Wan	MEDS STACFEN Report 2020
SCR Doc. 21-008	N7175	A.Nogueira, M.Treble , H.Benoît, and K.J. Hedges	Evaluation report of the Greenland halibut 1CD and 0A deep-water surveys
SCR Doc. 21-009	N7176	F. Cyr, P. S. Galbraith, C. Layton, D. Hebert, N. Chen, G. Han	Environmental and Physical Oceanographic Conditions on the Eastern Canadian shelves (NAFO Sub-areas 2, 3 and 4) during 2020.
SCR Doc. 21-010	N7177	D. Bélanger, P. Pepin, G. Maillet	Biogeochemical oceanographic conditions in the Northwest Atlantic (NAFO subareas 2-3-4) during 2020
SCR Doc. 21-011	N7178	Rasmus Nygaard, Søren L. Post, Anja Retzel, Karl Zinglersen, Lars Heilmann, Sofie R. Jeremiassen, Signe Jeremiassen, Louise Mølgaard and Jørgen Sethsen	Biomass and Abundance of Demersal Fish Stocks in the Nuuk fjord.
SCR Doc. 21-012	N7179	Rasmus Nygaard	Survey results from the Uummannaq gillnet survey in NAFO Division 1A inshore.
SCR Doc. 21-013	N7180	Rasmus Nygaard	Trawl and gillnet survey results from the Disko Bay, NAFO Division 1A Inshore
SCR Doc. 21-014REV.	N7181	Rasmus Nygaard and Adriana Nogueira	Biomass and Abundance of Demersal Fish Stocks off West and East Greenland estimated from the Greenland Institute of Natural resources (GINR) Shrimp and Fish Survey (SFW), 1990-2020.
SCR Doc. 21-015	N7182	Rasmus Nygaard	Survey results from the Upernavik Gillnet survey, NAFO Division 1Ainshore.
SCR Doc. 21-016	N7184	Paul M. Regular, Bob Rogers, Laura Wheeland, Sean C. Anderson	NAFOdown: An R Markdown Template for Producing NAFO Scientific Council Documents
SCR Doc. 21-017	N7185	Diana González-Troncoso, Carmen Fernández and Fernando González-Costas	Assessment of the Cod Stock in NAFO Division 3M
SCR Doc. 21-018	N7186	D. Maddock Parsons & R. Rogers	2021 Assessment of Yellowtail Flounder in NAFO Divisions 3LNO using a Stock Production Model in a Bayesian Framework
SCR Doc. 21-019	N7187	D. Maddock Parsons, R. Rideout and R. Rogers	Divisions 3LNO Yellowtail Flounder (Limanda ferruginea) in the 2018-2020 Canadian Stratified Bottom Trawl Surveys.

SCR Doc. 21-020	N7188	Andrea M.J. Perreault, Laura Wheeland, Noel G. Cadigan	Updated state-space model for American plaice (Hippoglossoides platessoides) in Div. 3LNO
SCR Doc. 21-021	N7189	Irene Garrido, Diana González-Troncoso, Fernando González-Costas, Ricardo Alpoim	Analysis of 3M cod catch in all the fisheries across the Flemish Cap
SCR Doc. 21-022	N7190	M.R. Simpson and C.M. Miri	An Assessment of White Hake (Urophycis tenuis, Mitchill 1815) in NAFO Divisions 3N, 3O, and Subdivision 3Ps
SCR Doc. 21-023	N7191	F. Cyr and D. Bélanger	Environmental indices for NAFO subareas 0 to 4 in support of the Standing Committee on Fisheries Science (STACFIS)
SCR Doc. 21-024	N7192	Garrido, Irene, Fernando González-Costas, Diana González-Troncoso	Analysis of the bycatch of the moratorium stocks in the NRA
SCR Doc. 21-025	N7193	L. Wheeland	An exploration of the impact of natural mortality assumptions in a Virtual Population Analysis for Divisions 3LNO American Plaice
SCR Doc. 21-026	N7194	P.M. Regular, B. Rogers, M.J. Morgan	Greenland halibut (Reinhardtius hippoglossoides) in NAFO Subarea 2 and Divisions 3KLMNO: stock trends based on annual Canadian research vessel survey results
SCR Doc. 21-027	N7195	Cyr and Belanger	Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Centre, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, St. John's (NL)
SCR Doc. 21-028 REV.	N7196	M.R. Simpson et al.	Spatial-temporal variation in Greenland shark (Somniosus microcephalus) bycatch in the NAFO Regulatory Area
SCR Doc. 21-029	N7197	K. Yu. Fomin	Capelin Stock Assessment in NAFO Divisions 3NO Based on Data from Trawl Surveys
SCR Doc. 21-030	N7198	R.M. Rideout, P.M. Regular, D. Varkey	Exploration of alternative ADAPT model formulations for the assessment of Atlantic Cod in Divs. 3NO
SCR Doc. 21-031	N7199	R.M. Rideout, R. Rogers, D.W. Ings	An Updated Assessment of the Cod Stock in NAFO Divisions 3NO
SCR Doc. 21-032	N7200	Rajeev Kumar, Divya A. Varkey, Laura Wheeland	Spatial state-space survey-based stock assessment (SSURBA) model for the Grand Bank stock of American plaice
SCR Doc. 21-033	N7201	K. Hedges, M. A. Treble, A. Nogueira, J. Nielsen, and H. Fock	Greenland shark bycatch data in NAFO Subareas 0+1.
SCR Doc. 21-034	N7203	R. Alpoim	To Be Submitted
SCR Doc. 21-035	N7204	L. Wheeland L. Wheeland, K. Dwyer, R. Kumar, R. Rideout, A. Perreault and B. Rogers	Assessment of American Plaice in Div. 3LNO

SCS Documents			
Serial No	**Doc No.**	**Author(s)**	**Title**
SCS Doc. 21/01	N7154	NAFO	COM Requests to SC 2022
SCS Doc. 21/02	N7155	DFG	Denmark (on behalf of Greenland) Coastal State Request for Scientific Advice - 2022
SCS Doc. 21/03	N7156	Canada	Canada's Request to NAFO SC for Coastal State Advice - 2022
SCS Doc. 21/04	N7159	Japan	Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency
SCS Doc. 21/05	N7161	Portugal	Portuguese Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/06	N7162	Spain	Spanish Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/07	N7164	Germany	German Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/08	N7167	Canada	Canadian Research Report 2020
SCS Doc. 21/09	N7168	Russia	Russian Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/10	N7169	Faroe Islands	Faroese Research Report 2020
SCS Doc. 21/11	N7170	Greenland	Denmark/Greenland Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/12 REV2.	N7171	NAFO	Biological Sampling Report
SCS Doc. 21/13	N7172	Estonia	Estonian Research Report for 2020
SCS Doc. 21/14	N7205	NAFO	Report of the Scientific Council Meeting 2021
SCS Doc. 21/15	N7206	NAFO	Scientific Council 5-Year Work Plan 2021

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