

SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Information regarding plans for consultation and decision-making regarding the possible addition of the Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes population) to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk on the *Species at Risk Act*.

Background:

As per 3.5 of the Harmonized Listing Process, DFO is informing NWMB of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessment results and a DFO intent to consult on the Arctic Lakes population of Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*) (Fig. 1).

Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes population)

The Arctic Lakes population of Atlantic Cod are presently confirmed in only three lakes in Nunavut on southern Baffin Island although Inuit knowledge suggests they may be present in more. One of these lakes, Ogac Lake near Frobisher Bay is said to be under increasing angling pressure. The other two lakes in Cumberland Sound, Tariujarusiq and Qasigialiminiq, are not known to be subject to fishing pressure. All three lakes are, however, very small and represent the only confirmed populations of this type. It is known that the cod mature late and grow very large making them attractive to some anglers. It is believed that these populations will not re-establish themselves should they be extirpated.



Figure 1: Photo of the Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*) in the marine environment.

Since the 2003 COSEWIC assessment, the biology and ecology of Atlantic Cod populations in Ogac Lake and Qasigialiminiq and Tariujarusiq lakes (at the south-western end of Cumberland Sound) (Fig. 2) have been studied in some detail. Those studies suggest that Atlantic Cod arrived in the Arctic about 5000-8000 years ago during a warmer period. As temperatures cooled, most Atlantic cod were pushed back south again except in a few warmer saline lakes. Cannibalism of younger cod by older cod occurs regularly, especially in Ogac Lake, and may be the only way that a few fish can reach maturity and a large size.

Although COSEWIC assessed the Arctic Lakes population as Special Concern in April 2010, the completed status report will not be available until late August. A designation of Special Concern means “a wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered if nothing is done to help protect it”. These populations are being listed as Special Concern because they are limited in number (three) and the lakes in which they exist have a combined area of < 20 km² making them very susceptible to disturbance.

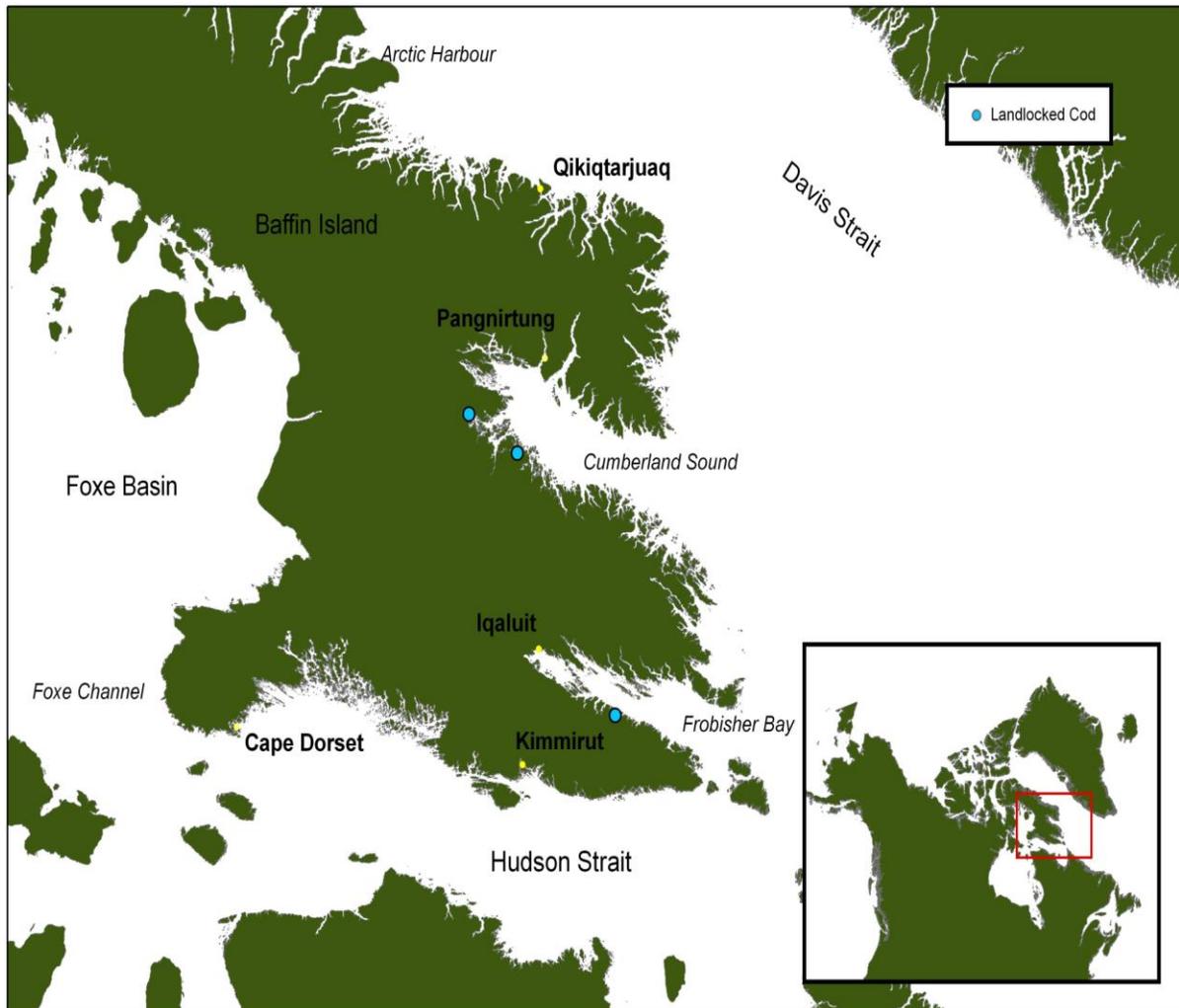


Figure 2: The location of the Arctic Lakes population of Atlantic Cod in Nunavut.

Previous Community Consultation

In May 2003 COSEWIC assessed both marine and Arctic Lakes populations of Atlantic Cod as Special Concern. Consultations were held in Iqaluit, Pangnirtung and Qikiqtarjuaq in November 2004. The HTOs and communities did not support listing.

In April 2006 the Governor in Council referred the assessment of Atlantic Cod back to COSEWIC for three reasons: (1) it did not include adequate Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, and, (2) it was not clear why COSEWIC combined the marine and landlocked lake populations for their assessment.

In December 2006, COSEWIC reaffirmed their original assessment without reassessing the species, citing an absence of new information that would lead to a change in status. COSEWIC also noted the Special Concern category is not based on any index of decline, but is used to identify species which may become Threatened or Endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Requirements for Consultation and Approval

Article 5.2.34 (f) of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement states that the NWMB shall, at its discretion, approve the designation of rare, threatened or endangered species. As well, Section 27 (2) (c) of the SARA requires that before making a recommendation as to whether or not to add a species at risk to Schedule 1, the Minister must consult the Board for species found in an area in respect of which the Board is authorized by a land claims agreement to perform its functions.

In Nunavut, these three populations of Atlantic Cod may be harvested by Inuit and non-Inuit. For this reason, DFO Central and Arctic Region will be conducting consultations at the community level to hear the views of Inuit regarding the possible addition of these populations to the List of Wildlife Species.

Consultation and Approval:

The Department of Fisheries & Oceans will be issuing a Response Statement for the Arctic Lakes populations of Atlantic Cod within 90 days after the final assessment report is provided to the Minister by COSEWIC. The Response Statements will outline how the Minister intends to respond to COSEWIC's assessment and, to the extent possible, provide timelines for action.

DFO is planning to consult at the community level for these populations of Atlantic Cod this fall to ensure that any listing decision is made in full consideration of the views of Inuit. We will contact Iqaluit and Pangnirtung to arrange public meetings and meetings with the Boards of local HTOs. In addition, we are in the process of developing a consultation workbook which will be translated and distributed during the community meetings for those who may prefer to prepare a written response. As well, people can provide their comments to us by e-mail or regular letter. Comments received through the consultation sessions, workbook and by mail will be used by

the Minister to decide whether to recommend legal listing of these populations. A consultation summary will be provided to the NWMB by mid April 2011.

Approval

After public consultations have been completed, as well as some associated regulatory processes, DFO will provide the Board with a summary of the community consultations for the Arctic lake populations of Atlantic Cod and indicate what the Minister plans to recommend to the Governor-in-Council (GIC). At that time, possibly in late spring of 2011, DFO will ask the Board whether or not it approves of those recommendations.

Prepared by:

Sam Stephenson, Species at Risk Biologist, DFO, Central and Arctic Region,
Winnipeg

Date:

26 July 2010