



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
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Species at Risk Program

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Subject: Proposed listing of the Arctic Lakes populations of Atlantic Cod as a species of *Special Concern* under the *Species at Risk Act*

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is sending this advance notice to Inuit and other Aboriginal organizations that may wish to review and provide feedback to the Government of Canada on the proposed listing of Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes populations) as a species of *Special Concern* under the *Species at Risk Act*.

A species of *Special Concern* is defined as a wildlife species that may become a *Threatened* or an *Endangered* species because of a combination of biological characteristics and threats. An *Endangered* species is a wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction. Legal restrictions (or prohibitions) under the *Species at Risk Act*, which could limit activities that would harm animals or their habitat, apply only to those species listed as *Extirpated*, *Endangered* or *Threatened*. For species listed as *Special Concern*, there are no restrictions.

Before a species is offered legal protection under *SARA*, it is first assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). This independent committee of experts uses available scientific, community and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge to assess whether a species or population is at risk. The assessment by COSEWIC is provided to the Minister of the Environment who will, upon review of the assessment, provide a recommendation to the Governor in Council as to whether or not a species should be listed under the *Species at Risk Act*, or referred back to COSEWIC for further evaluation.

In May 2003, COSEWIC evaluated the Arctic Lakes population and the Arctic Marine populations of Atlantic Cod as a single unit, and assessed it to be to *Special Concern*. Consultations were held in Iqaluit, Pangnirtung and Qikiqtaaluaq in November 2004. The Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) and their communities did not support listing under *SARA* at that time. The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board also opposed a *SARA* listing.

Partially as a result of concerns raised during the consultations, the federal government returned the COSEWIC assessment back to COSEWIC for its re-assessment. The reasons were:

- The COSEWIC assessment did not include adequate Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge;
- It was not clear why COSEWIC combined the marine and lake populations into a single assessment; and

- There was no evidence presented by COSEWIC to support a decline in the population in either the marine or the landlocked environments.

In 2006, COSEWIC reaffirmed their original assessment as *Special Concern* without re-assessing the species; however, it was not federally listed under SARA.

In April 2010, COSEWIC separated the Atlantic Cod's Arctic populations into two units: 1) Arctic Lakes populations; and 2) Arctic Marine populations.

The Arctic Lakes populations unit was assessed by COSEWIC as a species of *Special Concern* due to its limited distribution in only three isolated lakes on Baffin Island. The total combined area of habitat is less than 20 km². One of the lakes, Ogac Lake, is accessible for fishing and large numbers of the Atlantic Cod may be removed from the lake if fishing increases. Rescue from other populations is not possible should any of these three lake populations be lost due to human activity.

The Arctic Marine populations unit is considered by COSEWIC to be *Data Deficient* as there is not enough information to make an assessment.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) informed the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board of the new COSEWIC assessment on September 14, 2010. DFO also stated its intention to conduct consultations on the Arctic Lakes populations. DFO plans to meet with the Hunters and Trappers Organizations and hold public meetings with the communities of Pangnirtung and Iqaluit in January, 2011. Results of these consultations will inform DFO's advice to the Minister of the Environment as to whether or not the Arctic Lakes populations should be listed under SARA as *Special Concern*.

If the federal government decides to add the Arctic Lakes populations of Atlantic Cod to the SARA List as *Special Concern*, DFO must prepare a management plan within three years of legal listing. The management plan will be developed in consultation with the Hunters and Trapper Organizations of Pangnirtung and Iqaluit and may include the involvement of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board.

Although listing the Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes populations) under SARA will not trigger any prohibitions, activities recommended in the management plan may impact traditional Inuit hunting, fishing or harvesting practices. Consequently, we would appreciate hearing your views on how the proposed addition of the Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes populations) could affect you or your community. For your convenience, we are developing a workbook in Inuktitut and English describing the *Species at Risk Act* and the status and habitat of the Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes populations). We will be providing this to you shortly.

Comments received by February 11, 2011 will be reviewed and considered prior to DFO providing its listing recommendation for the Atlantic Cod (Arctic Lakes populations) to the Minister of the Environment.

We will be contacting you in the next few weeks to arrange meetings to discuss the Arctic Cod Lakes population.

Should you have any questions or comments in the meantime, please contact me at (204) 984-0577 or 1-866-538-1609 at your convenience.

Yours truly,

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