



ESTUARY AND GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE NORTHERN SHRIMP STOCK ASSESSMENT IN 2025

CONTEXT

The Fishery management sector of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has requested an assessment of the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence northern shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) stocks, namely the Estuary, Sept-Iles, Anticosti and Esquiman stocks. These stocks are among the major stocks subject to the Fish Stocks provisions of the *Fisheries Act* and are subject to either an [integrated fisheries management plan](#) or rebuilding plan.

This Science Advisory Report is from the regional peer review of January 22, 2026 on the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence Northern Shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) Stocks Assessment in 2025. Additional publications from this meeting will be posted on the [Fisheries and Oceans Canada \(DFO\) Science Advisory Schedule](#) as they become available.

SCIENCE ADVICE

Status

- The stock status indicator for the Estuary is above the proposed upper stock reference with a very high probability in 2025, placing this stock in the healthy zone of the Precautionary Approach (PA).
- In 2025, the Sept-Iles, Anticosti and Esquiman stocks are placed in the critical zone of the PA with respectively a very high, neutral and moderately high probability.

Trends

- The biomass for Estuary stock has remained high for four years.
- After years of decline, the biomasses for Sept-Iles, Anticosti, and Esquiman stocks have shown an increase, following historic lows recorded in 2023.
- The relative exploitation rates of the Sept-Iles, Anticosti, and Esquiman stocks have declined over the past three years, reaching historically low levels. For the Estuary stock, this rate has been stable since 2018, at values lower than those of previous years.
- In general, juvenile abundance observed over the past five years has been low in all four stocks.

Ecosystem and Climate Change Considerations

- Although deep water temperatures have stabilized over the past three years, part of the northern shrimp population remains exposed to historically warm and oxygen poor conditions.
- The impact of predation by redfish is expected to decrease in the coming years, but remains at historically high levels.

Stock Advice

- Although the Sept-Iles, Anticosti, and Esquiman stocks remain in the critical zone, an improvement in their status was observed in 2025. This positive trend could be partly attributed to the decrease in redfish predation as well as the reduction in fishing pressure.
- According to the harvest control rules, the projected maximum harvests for 2026 fishing season are: 1,261 t for Estuary, 917 t for Sept-Iles, 2,009 t for Anticosti and 1,498 t for Esquiman.

BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Assessment Details

Year Assessment Approach was Approved

This assessment follows the framework developed in 2023 during the review of the precautionary approach (DFO 2023, Bourdages et al. 2023, Smith and Bourdages 2024).

Assessment Type

Full Assessment

Most Recent Assessment Date

1. Last Full Assessment: January 2022 (DFO 2022)
2. Last Interim-Year Update: November 2024 (DFO 2025)

Stock Assessment Approach

1. Broad category: single stock assessment model
2. Specific category: Surplus Production model

Ecosystem and Climate Change Assessment Approach

Detailed information on the biology of northern shrimp in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence (EGSL), as well as on its ecosystem, are presented in Bourdages et al. (in preparation) and Chamberland et al. (in preparation). Furthermore, the physical, chemical, and biological oceanographic conditions of the EGSL are described in Galbraith et al. (2025) and Blais et al. (2025).

Stock Structure Assumption

Results from a recent genomics study suggest that northern shrimp from the EGSL form a different population from adjacent populations on the Scotian Shelf and Newfoundland/Labrador/Arctic (Bourret et al. 2024). These results show reduced connectivity between these three populations.

Other results also suggest that there are distinct biological components within the EGSL. The results of the population genomics study show that connectivity seems limited between certain stocks in the EGSL, and more particularly between Esquiman stock and the other stocks further west (Bourdages et al. 2023).

This stock assessment is based on the delineations of the four assessment units described in Bourdages et al. (2023).

Reference Points

Reference points have been developed for each stock.

- Limit Reference Point (LRP): 0.4 (40%) of biomass at maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}).
- Upper Stock Reference (USR) proposed: 0.8 (80%) of B_{MSY} .
- Target Reference Point (TRP) proposed: B_{MSY} .
- Removal Reference (RR) proposed: relative exploitation rate at maximum sustainable yield when the stock is in the healthy zone (F_{MSY}).

Management Objectives

Since fall 2025, Sept-Iles, Anticosti, and Esquiman stocks have been subject to a rebuilding plan whose main objective is to promote biomass growth until it reaches a level above the LRP with a 75% probability. Due to the recent decline in productivity observed for these stocks, no rebuilding timeline could be established.

Harvest Control Rules

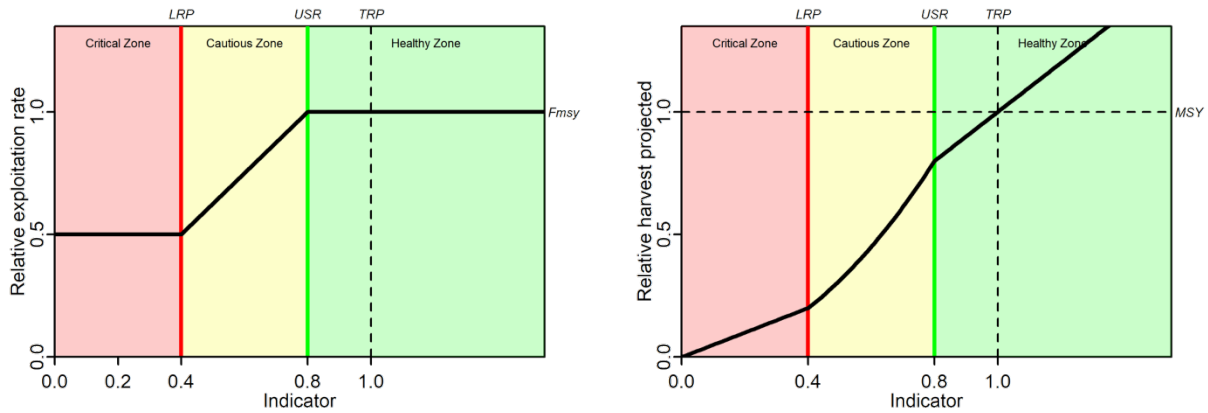


Figure 1. Harvest control rules presenting relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY} , left) and relative projected maximum harvest (right) as a function of the stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}). The reference points are presented on the panels by the vertical lines which define the three zones of the precautionary approach.

Data

- Commercial landings and fishing effort: 1982-2025.
- Annual ecosystem survey of the Estuary and northern Gulf of St. Lawrence conducted in August (hereafter nGSL survey): 1990-2025 for the Sept-Iles, Anticosti and Esquiman stocks, and 2008-2025 for Estuary stock. This bottom trawl survey covers the entire distribution area of northern shrimp in the EGSL.

ASSESSMENT

Stock Status and Trends for Estuary

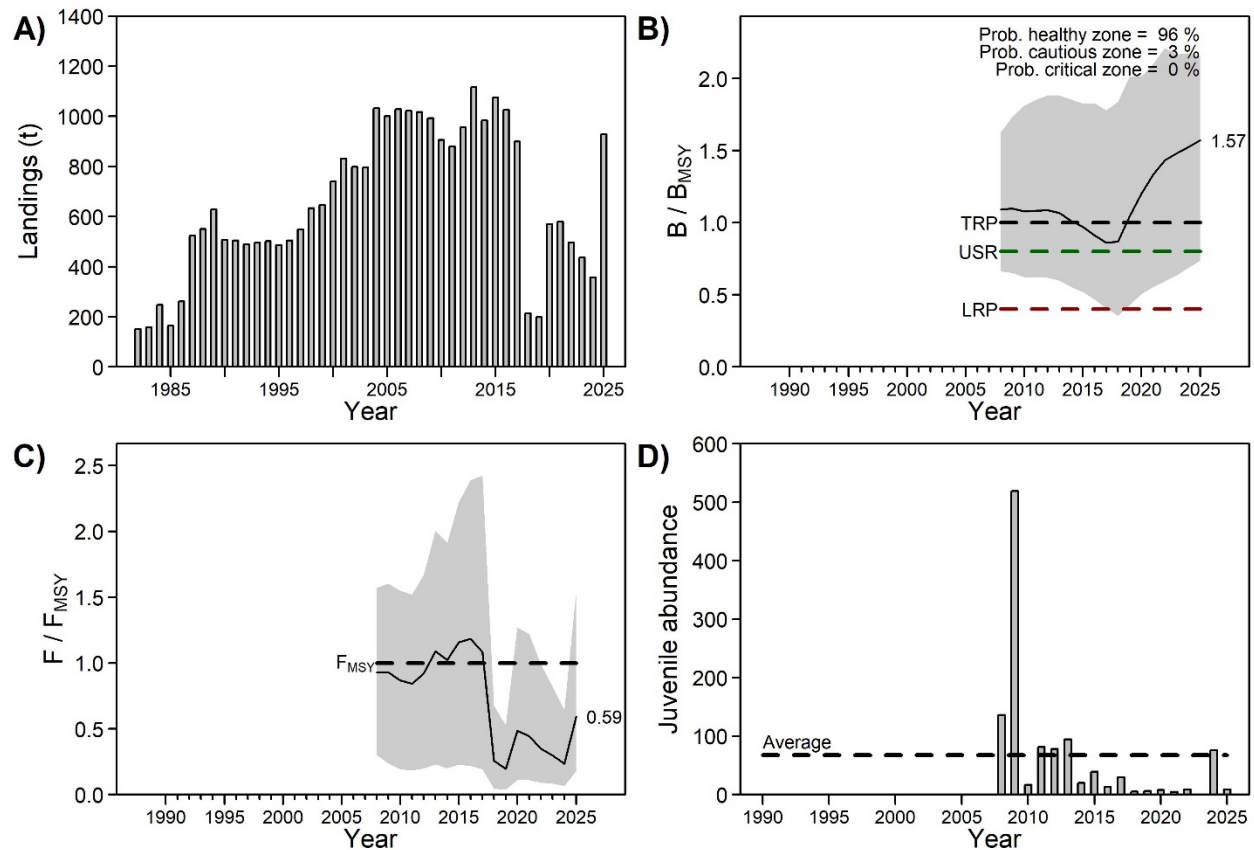


Figure 2. Estuary stock. (A) Landings, (B) stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}), (C) relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}), (D) juvenile abundance (in millions, data not available in 2023).

Biomass

Biomass has increased since 2019, reaching since 2022 the highest levels in the entire time series starting in 2008 (Figure 2B). In 2025, biomass was above the proposed USR and was estimated at 1.57 times the B_{MSY} .

Exploitation rate

The relative exploitation rate increased in 2025 but remained lower than the annual values observed before 2018 (Figure 2C).

Recruitment

Juvenile shrimp abundance has been low over the past twelve years, with the exception of 2024 when it was average (Figure 2D).

Current Status

The Estuary stock is currently above the proposed USR and is therefore in the healthy zone of the PA with a probability of 96%. Despite the significant uncertainty of the biomass estimates, biomass is expected to decrease according an one-year projection (Table 2).

Stock Status and Trends for Sept-Iles

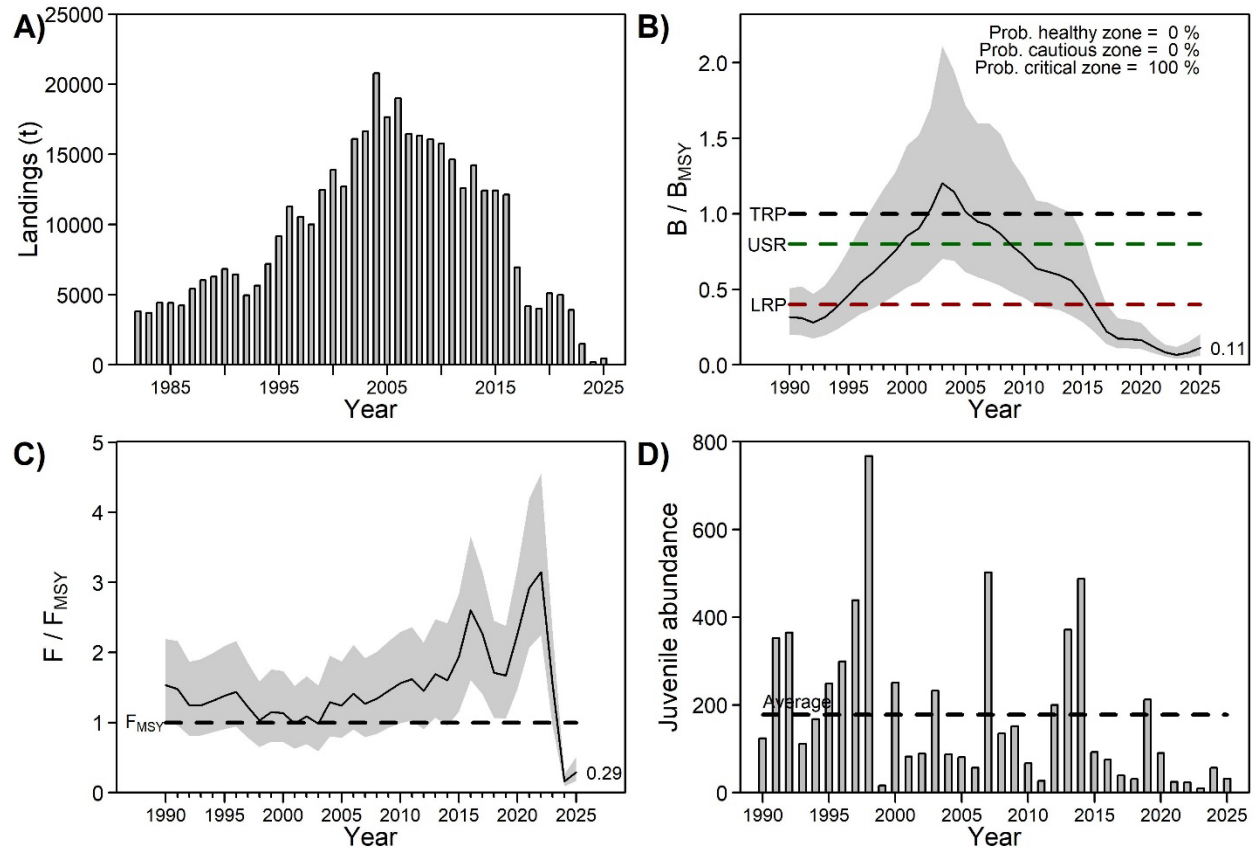


Figure 3. Sept-Iles stock. (A) Landings, (B) stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}), (C) relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}), (D) juvenile abundance (in millions).

Biomass

In 2025, biomass increased slightly after reaching a historic low level in 2023, following twenty years of decline (Figure 3B). Since 2016, biomass has been in the critical zone of the PA. In 2025, it was estimated at 0.11 of B_{MSY} , which corresponds to 28% of the LRP.

Exploitation rate

The relative exploitation rate decreased sharply after 2022, reaching historically low levels since 2024 (Figure 3C).

Recruitment

Juvenile shrimp abundance has been low for the past six years (Figure 3D).

Current Status

The Sept-Iles stock is currently below the LRP and therefore in the critical zone of the PA with a probability of 100%.

Stock Status and Trends for Anticosti

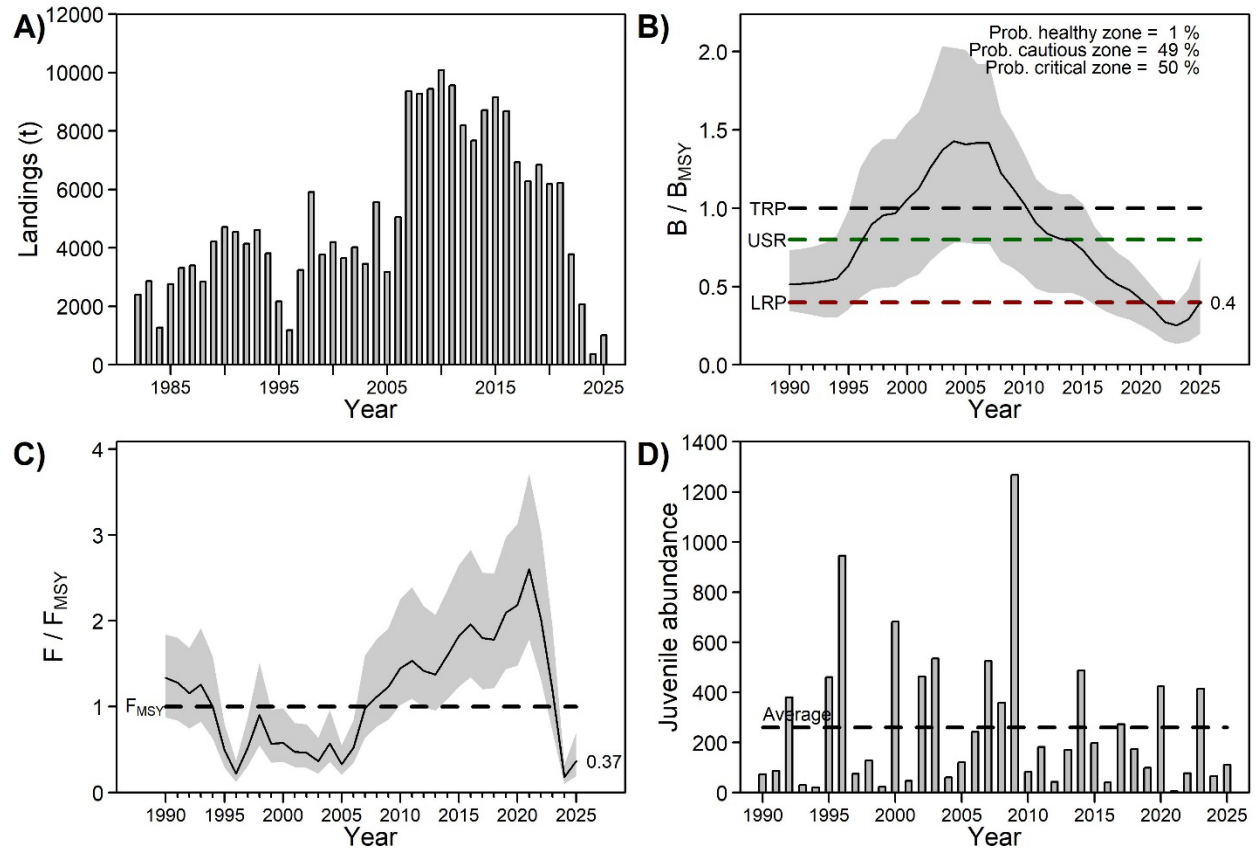


Figure 4. Anticosti stock. (A) Landings, (B) stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}), (C) relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}), (D) juvenile abundance (in millions).

Biomass

Since 2023, biomass has increased after reaching a historic low level, following fifteen years of decline (Figure 4B). Since 2021, biomass has been in the critical zone of the PA. In 2025, it was estimated at 0.40 of B_{MSY} , which corresponds to the LRP.

Exploitation rate

The relative exploitation rate decreased sharply after 2022, reaching historically low levels since 2024 (Figure 4C).

Recruitment

Juvenile shrimp abundance has been low over the past five years, with the exception of 2023 (Figure 4D).

Current Status

The Anticosti stock is currently at the LRP level and is therefore in the critical zone of the PA with a 50% probability. The high abundance of juveniles observed in 2020 and 2023 could explain the increase in stock biomass in 2025.

Stock Status and Trends for Esquiman

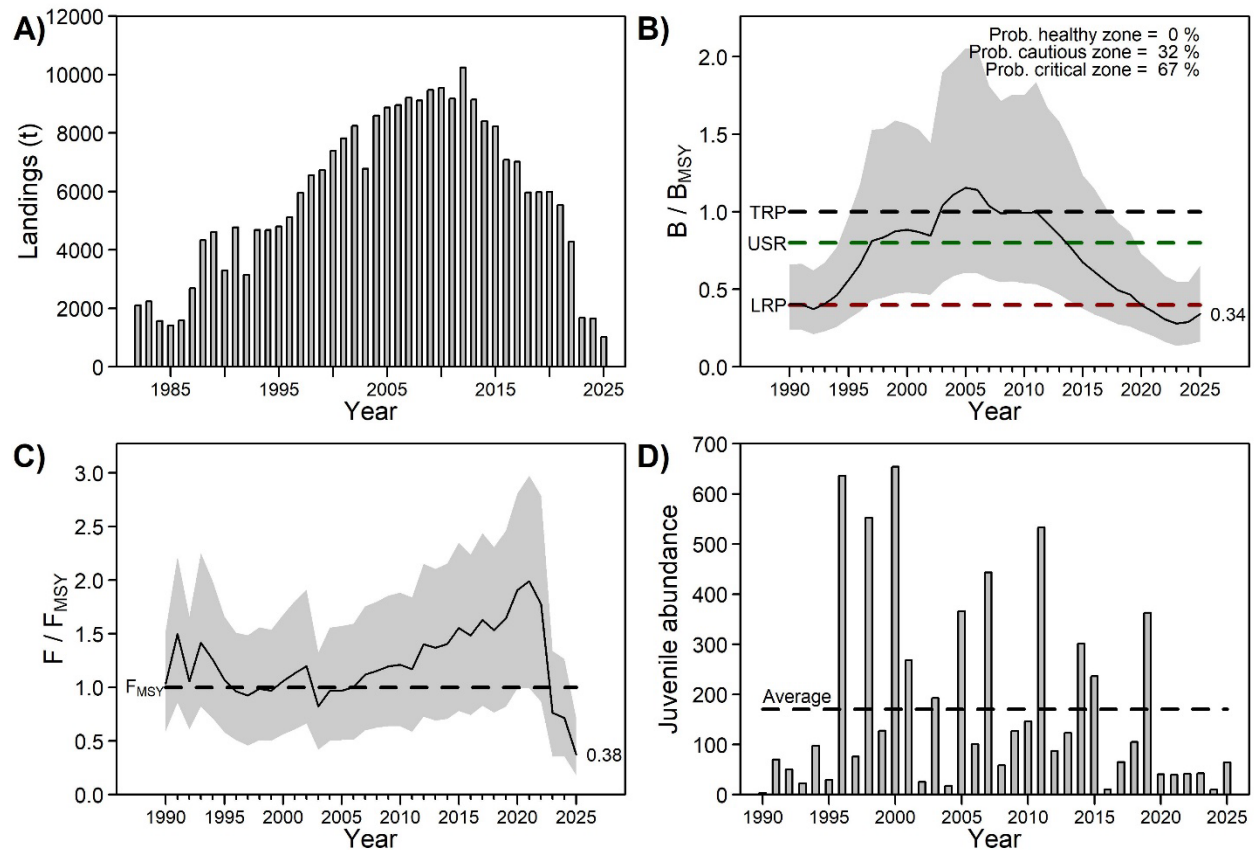


Figure 5. Esquiman stock. (A) Landings, (B) stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}), (C) relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}), (D) juvenile abundance (in millions).

Biomass

In 2025, biomass increased slightly after reaching a historic low level in 2023, following more than ten years of decline (Figure 5B). Since 2020, biomass has been in the critical zone of the PA. In 2025, it was estimated at 0.34 of B_{MSY} , which corresponds to 86% of the LRP.

Exploitation rate

The relative exploitation rate has decreased since 2023, reaching the lowest historical value in 2025 (Figure 5C).

Recruitment

Juvenile shrimp abundance has been low for the past six years (Figure 5D).

Current Status

The Esquiman stock is currently below the LRP and therefore in the critical zone of the PA with a probability of 67%.

History of Landings

Landings of northern shrimp throughout the EGSL have gradually increased from nearly 1,000 metric tons (t) at the start of the exploitation in the 1970s to over 35,000 t in the late 2000s. Landings have subsequently declined, reaching 2,570 t in 2024 and 3,381 t in 2025 (preliminary data as of January 5, 2026), out of overall total allowable catches (TAC) of 3,060 t and 3,809 t, respectively. The landings in 2024 and 2025 are the lowest recorded since 1974.

Preliminary statistics indicate landings per fishing area, in 2024 and 2025, of 357 t and 929 t in the Estuary (TAC of 473 t and 946 t), 187 t and 453 t in Sept-Iles (TAC of 342 t and 807 t), 366 t and 1,025 t in Anticosti (TAC of 488 t and 885 t), and 1,660 t and 1,024 t in Esquiman (TAC of 1,757 t and 1,171 t) (Table 1).

Commercial catch per unit of effort values have increased since 2023 for the Sept-Iles, Anticosti and Esquiman stocks, while they have remained stable for the Estuary stock (Table 1).

Table 1. Landings (t), fishing effort (hours) and catch per unit of effort (CPUE, kg/h) standardized by stock for Estuary (12), Sept-Iles (10), Anticosti (9) and Esquiman (8). The statistics presented are annual averages by decade, or totals by year.

Year Stock	Landings (t)				Effort (hours)				CPUE (kg/h)			
	12	10	9	8	12	10	9	8	12	10	9	8
1982-1989	336	4798	2889	2572	4640	51342	24733	16893	72	93	117	152
1990-1999	532	8462	3816	4976	3193	61378	23712	20998	167	138	161	237
2000-2009	926	16568	5723	8444	2570	56609	17057	18360	360	293	336	460
2010-2019	826	10939	8212	8080	3270	42847	26601	15392	253	255	309	525
2020	570	5101	6182	5992	1450	22413	22580	10424	393	228	274	575
2021	579	4982	6233	5535	1779	21606	25857	13146	325	231	241	421
2022	496	3909	3784	4276	756	21657	19482	13860	656	180	194	309
2023	437	1486	2073	1677	1403	17720	18302	8502	311	84	113	197
2024	357	187	366	1660	1431	1743	1732	7652	249	107	211	217
2025	929	460	1019	1024	2962	2816	3845	2836	314	163	265	361

Ecosystem and Climate Change Considerations

Over the past nine years, predation pressure from redfish (*Sebastes* spp.) on northern shrimp has been particularly high, a key factor contributing to the decline of this species (Isabel and Senay, in preparation). The degree of spatial overlap between shrimp and redfish varies across stocks: it is currently low for Estuary and Sept-Iles stocks, while it is greater for Anticosti and Esquiman stocks (Poissant et al. in preparation). Even though redfish biomass has been declining since 2020 (Senay et al. in preparation), predation pressure is expected to remain at historically high levels in the coming years.

For over 15 years, northern shrimp in the EGSL experienced warming waters and a decrease in dissolved oxygen (DO) in its habitat. These changes have led to a shift in the distribution of the Estuary and Sept-Iles stocks, where the shrimp now occupy grounds in shallower waters than before. However, no changes in distribution based on depth have yet been observed for Anticosti and Esquiman stocks (Figure 6).

By moving to grounds closer to the cold intermediate layer, shrimp in the Estuary and Sept-Iles stocks now occupy colder and more oxygenated waters (Figure 6). Conversely, by remaining at their usual depth, the Anticosti and Esquiman stocks continue to be exposed to warm, low-oxygen conditions. Between 2022 and 2025, more than 50% of the biomass of female shrimp in Anticosti and Esquiman was exposed to temperatures exceeding 6.5°C and oxygen levels below 30%.

Laboratory experiments on the combined effects of warming, acidification and hypoxia indicate that the survival and aerobic performance of shrimp could decrease considerably under the cumulative impact of these factors (Guscelli et al. 2023).

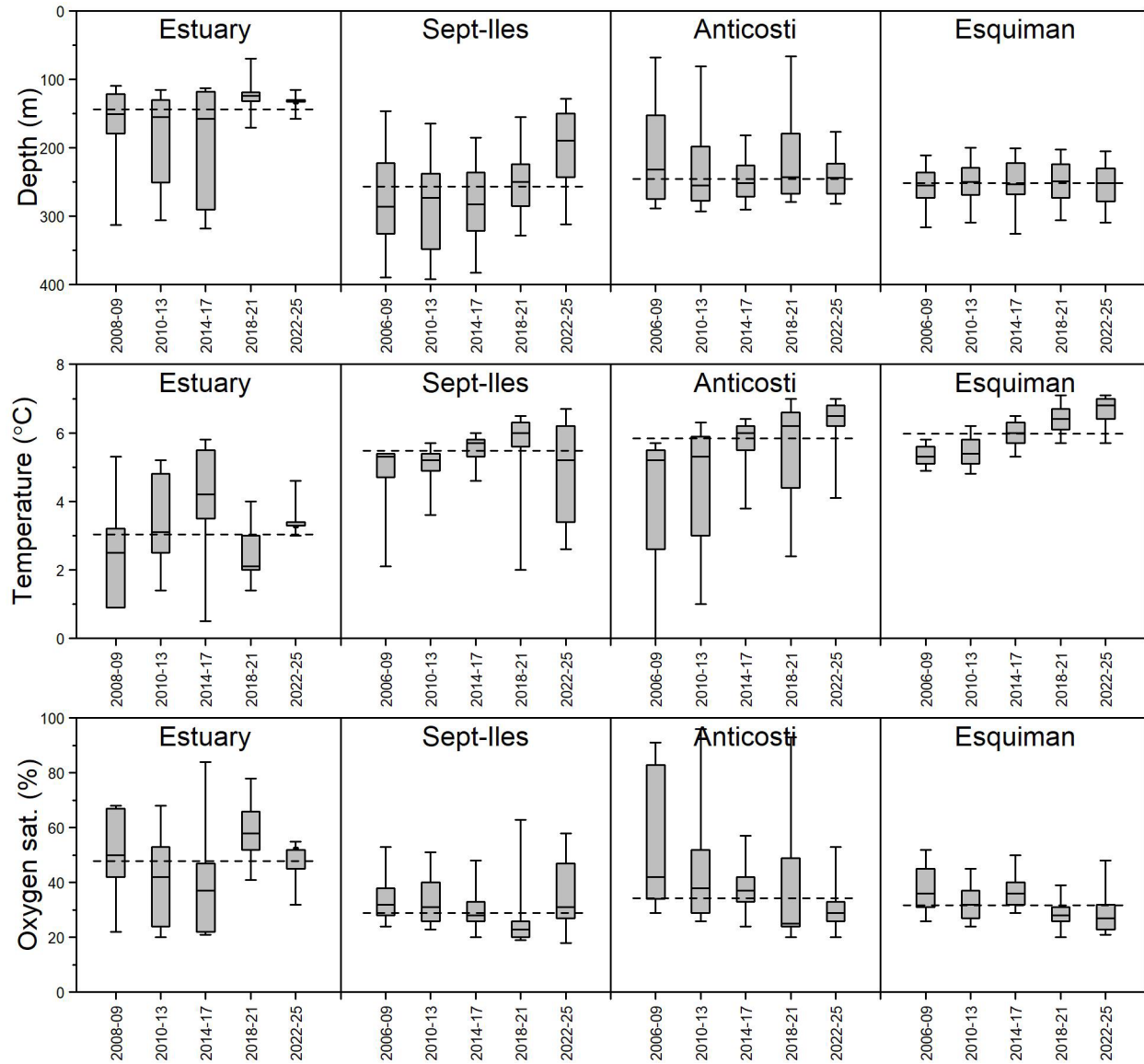


Figure 6. Female shrimp biomass distribution based on bottom-water depth, temperature and dissolved oxygen saturation per four-year period from the August nGSL survey from 2006 to 2025 (2008 to 2025 in Estuary).

Stock Advice

The Estuary stock is still in the healthy zone and shows a projected decline for 2026. Although the Sept-Iles, Anticosti, and Esquiman stocks remain in the critical zone, an improvement in their status was observed in 2025. This positive trend could be attributed in part to decreased predation by redfish and reduced fishing pressure.

Despite improvements in some ecosystem conditions, the overall context remains unfavorable for northern shrimp, and significant improvement is unlikely. The outlook for these stocks therefore remains dependent on the sensitivity and resilience of northern shrimp to environmental changes, predation pressure and fishing pressure.

Harvest Control Rules

According to the harvest control rules, the projected maximum harvests for the 2026 fishing season are: 1,261 t for Estuary, 917 t for Sept-Iles, 2,009 t for Anticosti and 1,498 t for Esquiman (Table 2).

Table 2. Projected maximum harvest for 2026 per stock according the harvest control rules.

Stock	Stock Status 2025	B_{2026}/B_{MSY}	F_{2026}/F_{MSY}	Projected maximum harvest (t)
Estuary	Healthy zone	1.37	1.00	1,261
Sept-Iles	Critical zone	0.15	0.50	917
Anticosti	Critical zone	0.51	0.62	2,009
Esquiman	Critical zone	0.41	0.52	1,498

PROCEDURE FOR INTERIM-YEAR UPDATES

A full assessment of these stocks is carried out every two years. In the interim-year, an update of the stock status indicator will be produced. In addition, the projected maximum harvests, based on the harvest control rules, will also be presented for the next fishing season.

BYCATCH

The use of the Nordmore separator grid inside the trawl is mandatory when fishing for shrimp to significantly reduce bycatch. A review of small fish bycatch, based on data collected by at-sea observers, reveals that, on average, their weight represents approximately 2% of the total northern shrimp catch. The main species caught in 2025 were, in order of importance, Greenland halibut, capelin, herring, American plaice, redfish and witch flounder. The estimated total catches for each of these species represented less than 1% of their estimated relative biomass during the nGSL survey.

SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

There are several uncertainties associated with estimating the annual consumption of northern shrimp by redfish. While this predation is known to be a significant contributing factor to stock declines, its magnitude and severity are unknown. However, redfish biomass in the EGSL has

been declining in recent years, although it remains at historically high levels. The impact of redfish predation could therefore decrease in the coming years but remain significant.

The deep waters of the EGSL have warmed and depleted in DO in recent years (Blais et al. 2025, Galbraith et al. 2025). These changes have exposed a portion of the northern shrimp population to environmental conditions approaching the tolerance limit of the species and have likely affected stock productivity. Although deep water temperatures have stabilized over the past three years, these conditions are predicted to continue to deteriorate in the long term according to different climate change scenarios (Lavoie et al. 2020) and lead to a decrease in suitable habitat for northern shrimp (Shink et al. in preparation).

For the Estuary stock, the fit of the surplus production model is more uncertain than for the other stocks due to the shorter time series and the greater uncertainty associated with biomass estimation by the nGSL survey. The stock status trajectory is declining according to the one-year projection and the projected maximum harvest by the model exceeds the landings used for the model fitting. These factors contribute to an unquantified risk of overexploitation associated with the projected maximum harvest.

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