



SCALLOP (*PLACOPECTEN MAGELLANICUS* AND *CHLAMYS ISLANDICA*) STOCK ASSESSMENT IN QUEBEC COASTAL WATERS IN 2025

CONTEXT

Fisheries Management Sector of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), has requested stock status advice for scallop in Quebec's coastal waters (management units 15 to 20).

This Fisheries Science Advisory Report is from the peer review meeting of March 17 and 18, 2026, on Quebec Coastal Waters Scallop (*Placopecten magellanicus* and *Chlamys islandica*) Stock 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

- In 2025, the stock status indicator for Area 20A was above the proposed upper stock reference (USR) point, placing the stock in the healthy zone of the Precautionary Approach (PA) Framework.
- In 2025, the stock status indicators for areas 16E and 16F were below their respective limit reference points (LRPs) with high probabilities, placing these stocks in the critical zone of the PA Framework.
- Stock status is uncertain for areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 16B, 16C, 16D, 16G, 16H, 16I, 17A1, 17A2, 18A, 18B1, 18B2, 18C, 18D, 19A, 20B, 20C, 20E and 20F in the absence of reference points.

Trends

- The stock status indicator for Area 20A has been increasing since 2021 and is currently at a value comparable to those observed at the beginning of exploitation in the late 1960s.
- In Area 20A, the densities of sea scallops in the 85–99 mm and 70–84 mm size classes are high, close to their maximum historical values. Densities in the under 70 mm size class are low.
- After several years of declines, the biomass values for the stocks in areas 16E and 16F reached their lowest values in the time series and have remained at these levels since 2010.
- The abundance of the under 70 mm size class is the highest since the 1990s in Area 16E but remains low in Area 16F.
- No trends can be identified in the other areas because fishing effort is low or they are not fished at all.

Ecosystem and Climate Change Considerations

- Rising sea surface temperatures and thinning sea ice are altering the Gulf's ecological dynamics, affecting growth, larval survival and the productivity of scallop stocks, and phytoplankton composition. The impacts vary from region to region, and the effects on juveniles and adults are poorly documented.
- Changes in the seabed environment, linked to increased acidification and shell-boring polychaete infestation, are weakening the shells of adult scallops and increasing the energy costs of repair. Warmer temperatures could amplify scallops' vulnerability and potentially affect survival and reproduction, although a certain degree of resilience has been observed in some areas.

Stock Advice

- The stock in Area 20A has been in the PA healthy zone since 2022. A high abundance of commercial-sized scallops and scallops larger than 70 mm was observed in all beds surveyed in 2024; these scallops are expected to be available to the fishery in 2026. Under the PA Framework decision rules revised in 2026, the maximum fishing effort authorized for 2026 is 230 days at sea.
- Stocks in areas 16E and 16F have remained in the PA critical zone for more than 15 years without any significant signs of improvement. According to projections, if annual removals are less than 10 t in Area 16E and less than 2 t in Area 16F, the biomass could increase, but stocks would likely remain in the critical zone for the next three years.
- The status of the resource in areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 16I, 18A, 18B1, 19A and 20B cannot be determined because fishing efforts have been absent or low in recent years.

Other Management Questions

- The conservation approach for managing the stock in Area 20A was developed in 2010 and revised in 2026, and is now aligned with the Fishery Decision-Making Framework Incorporating the Precautionary Approach.
- Under the revised decision rules, the maximum authorized effort is limited to 230 fishing days, while the limit reference point and upper stock reference point remain unchanged.

BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Assessment Details

Year Assessment Approach Was Approved

The assessment approach for Area 20A was approved in 2010 (DFO 2010) and revised in 2026 (Belley et al. in prep.). The assessment approach for Area 16E was approved in 2023 (DFO 2023; Belley et al. 2026) and the approach for Area 16F, in 2024 (DFO 2025a).

Assessment Type

Full assessment

Most Recent Assessment Date

1. Last full assessment: 2023 (DFO 2023)

2. Last interim-year update: 2025 (Area 20A, DFO 2025b)

Stock Assessment Approach

1. Broad category: Index-based
2. Specific category: Surplus production model (areas 16E and 16F) and index-based (including fishery-dependent and fishery-independent indices)

Ecosystem and Climate Change Assessment Approach

The effects of the ecosystem on the stock were assessed outside the assessment model or stock index. This independent information was used qualitatively to help contextualize the results and provide an assessment of the environmental factors that are affecting the status of the stock. Information on the biology of scallops, their ecosystem, coastal environmental conditions and the spatial morphological variations as a function of oceanographic parameters is described in Belley et al. (in prep.), Dumas et al. (in prep.)¹ and Couillard et al. (in prep.)². Parasitic infestations are discussed in Couillard et al. (in prep.)³.

Stock Structure Assumption

Landings from a given fishing area consist mainly of only one of the two species covered in this advisory report, namely, sea scallop in areas 18B1, 19A and 20, and Iceland scallop in the other areas.

A genetic study of sea scallops showed low genetic variability across the Gulf of St. Lawrence, attributable to wide larval dispersal (Roy 2005). However, the beds along the Lower North Shore differ from the others and also from one another, suggesting that larval retention occurs in some bays.

Reference Points**Area 20A**

- Limit Reference Point (LRP): commercial CPUE of 0.85 kg of meat per hour·metre of fishing (kg/h·m)
- Proposed Upper Stock Reference (USR): commercial CPUE of 1.5 kg/h·m
- Removal Reference (RR): N/A
- Target Reference Point (TRP): N/A

¹ Dumas, J., Roy, V., and Galbraith, P.S. In preparation. Méthodologie et sommaire des conditions océanographiques physiques dans les régions côtières de l'estuaire et du nord du golfe du Saint-Laurent jusqu'en 2025. Can. Tech. Rep. Hydrogr. Ocean Sci. nnn: ix + nn pp.

² Couillard, C.M., Gravel-Brunet, C., Maltais, D., Lavoie, D., Riche, O., Belley, R., Deslauriers, D., and Florea, A. In preparation. Large-scale variation in shell morphometry and structural investment of *Chlamys islandica* across environmental gradients in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence and Hudson Bay.

³ Couillard, C.M., Gravel-Brunet, C., Goodwin, C., Carr, C., Nadalini, J.-B., and Belley, R. In preparation. Impacts of two associated species of boring polychaetes, *Polydora websteri* and *Dipolydora concharum*, in wild sea scallop, *Placopecten magellanicus*, in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Areas 16E and 16F

- Limit Reference Point (LRP): 0.4 (40%) of biomass at maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY})
- Proposed Upper Stock Reference (USR): 0.8 (80%) of B_{MSY}
- Removal Reference (RR): N/A
- Proposed Target Reference Point (TRP): B_{MSY}

Other Areas

- Limit Reference Point (LRP): N/A
- Upper Stock Reference (USR): N/A
- Removal Reference (RR): N/A
- Target Reference Point (TRP): N/A

Harvest Decision Rules

The Area 20A fishery has been effort-controlled since 2007. Decision rules were established in 2010 (DFO 2010; Trottier et al. 2017) and revised in 2026 (Belley et al. in prep.) to determine the authorized annual fishing effort in Area 20A. This effort is calculated using the primary stock status indicator (annual mean catch per unit effort [CPUE] from logbooks of commercial harvesters) and secondary indicators (sea scallop density indices from the most recent DFO research survey).

No decision rule is in place for the other areas to determine removals or fishing effort.

Data

- Commercial landings and fishing effort: 1965–2025 (data by marine sector) and 1987–2025 (data by fishing area)
- Research survey: 1987–2024 for Area 20A, 1990–2025 for Area 16E and 2004–2025 for Area 16F.

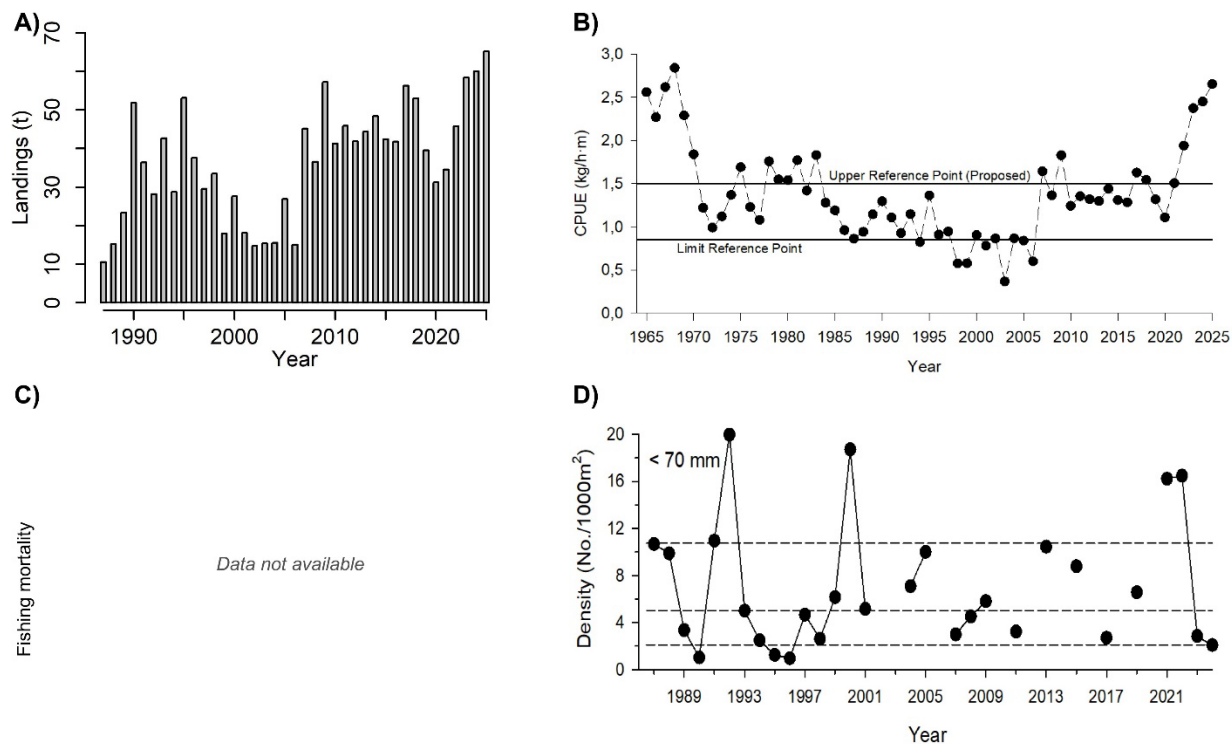
ASSESSMENT**Stock Status and Trends in Area 20A**

Figure 1. Area 20A. (A) Annual landings (t of meat). (B) Annual catch per unit of effort (CPUE) in the commercial fishery. (C) Fishing mortality data are unavailable. (D) Recruitment index estimated from the research survey data, expressed as the density (number/1,000 m²) of scallops less than 70 mm in size. The dotted lines indicate the 15th, 50th and 85th percentiles of the 1987–2008 series.

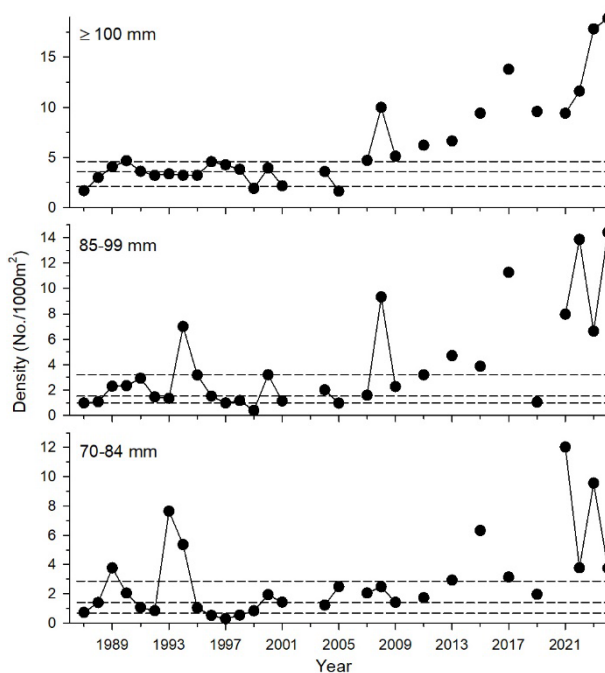


Figure 2. Density of sea scallops, by size class, in research surveys in Area 20A. The dotted lines indicate the 15th, 50th and 85th percentiles of the 1987–2008 series.

Landings

After reaching a low in the early 2000s, landings increased and stabilized at around 45 t between 2007 and 2019. Landings have been increasing since 2020 and reached 65 t in 2025, the highest value since 1987 (Figure 1A).

Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE)

The CPUE hovered around the proposed USR between 2007 and 2020 and then rose sharply. In 2025, it reached 2.65 kg/h·m, which is well above the proposed USR and comparable to the values observed when the fishery began in the late 1960s (Figure 1B).

Recruitment

The 2024 research survey shows high densities of sea scallops in the 85–99 mm and 70–84 mm size classes, near their maximum historical values. These scallops are expected to be recruited to the fishery in 1 and 2 years, respectively (Figure 2). However, densities of scallops in the under 70 mm size class are low and below the 15th percentile of the reference series (1987–2008) (Figure 1D).

Current Status

The CPUE has been increasing since 2020 and is above the proposed USR, placing the stock in the healthy zone of the PA Framework.

Stock Status and Trends in Area 16E

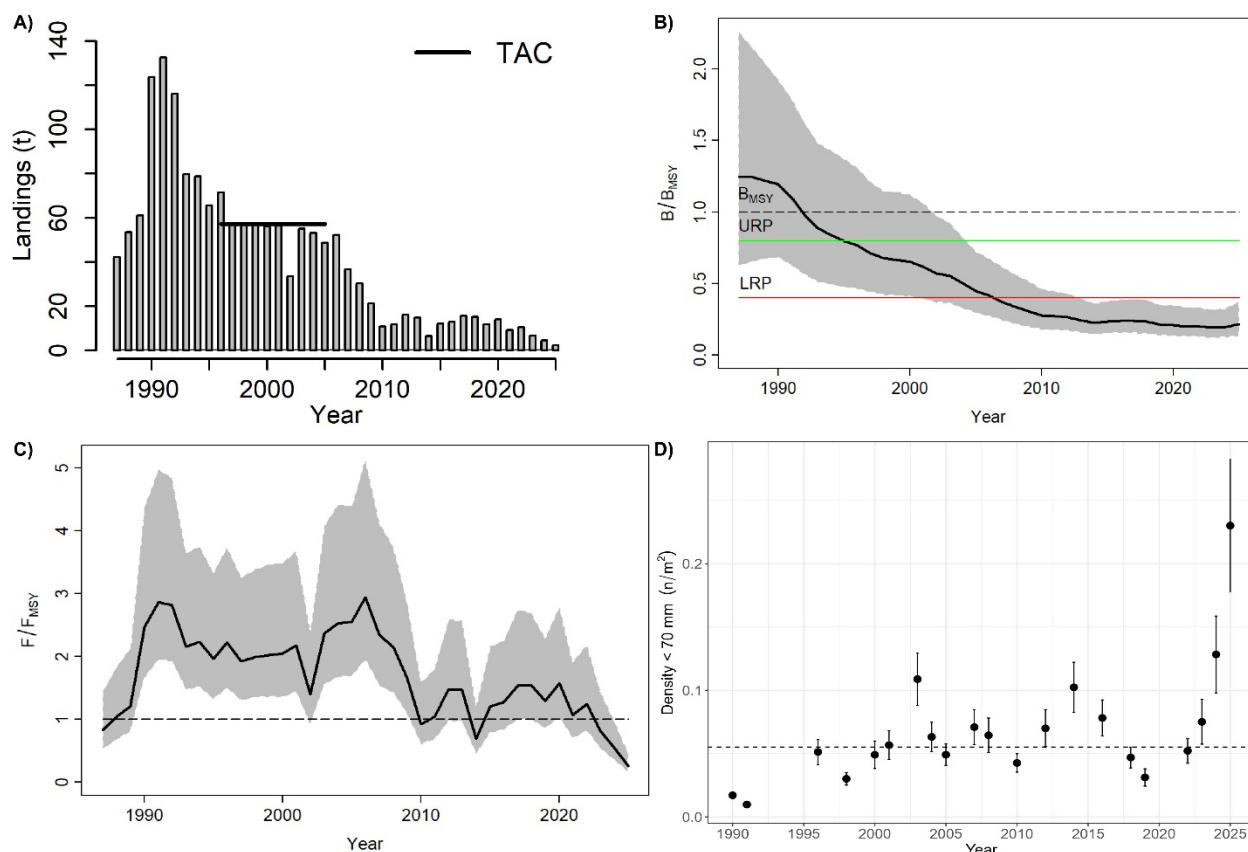


Figure 3. Area 16E. (A) Annual landings (t of meat) and total allowable catch (TAC). (B) Stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}). (C) Relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}). (D) Density of Iceland scallops less than 70 mm in size. The dotted line represents the reference mean (1990–2022).

Landings

Landings in Area 16E peaked at 133 t in 1991 and have been declining since then. In 2025, they reached their lowest level since 1987, at 2.3 t (Figure 3A).

Biomass

Biomass has been decreasing since 1987 and has remained below the LRP since 2007 (Figure 3B). In 2025, B_{MSY} was estimated at 0.22, which corresponds to 55% of the LRP.

Exploitation Rate

The relative exploitation rate is decreasing since 2020, and reached a record low in 2025 (Figure 3C).

Recruitment

The density of scallops in the under 70 mm size class has been increasing and has been above the reference mean since 2023 (Figure 3D). In 2025, it reached its highest level since 1990. These small individuals are found throughout Area 16E.

Current Status

Despite the increase in the density of scallops in the under 70 mm size class observed in the research survey since 2023, the stock remains below the LRP and is therefore in the critical zone of the PA Framework with a probability of 98%.

Stock Status and Trends in Area 16F

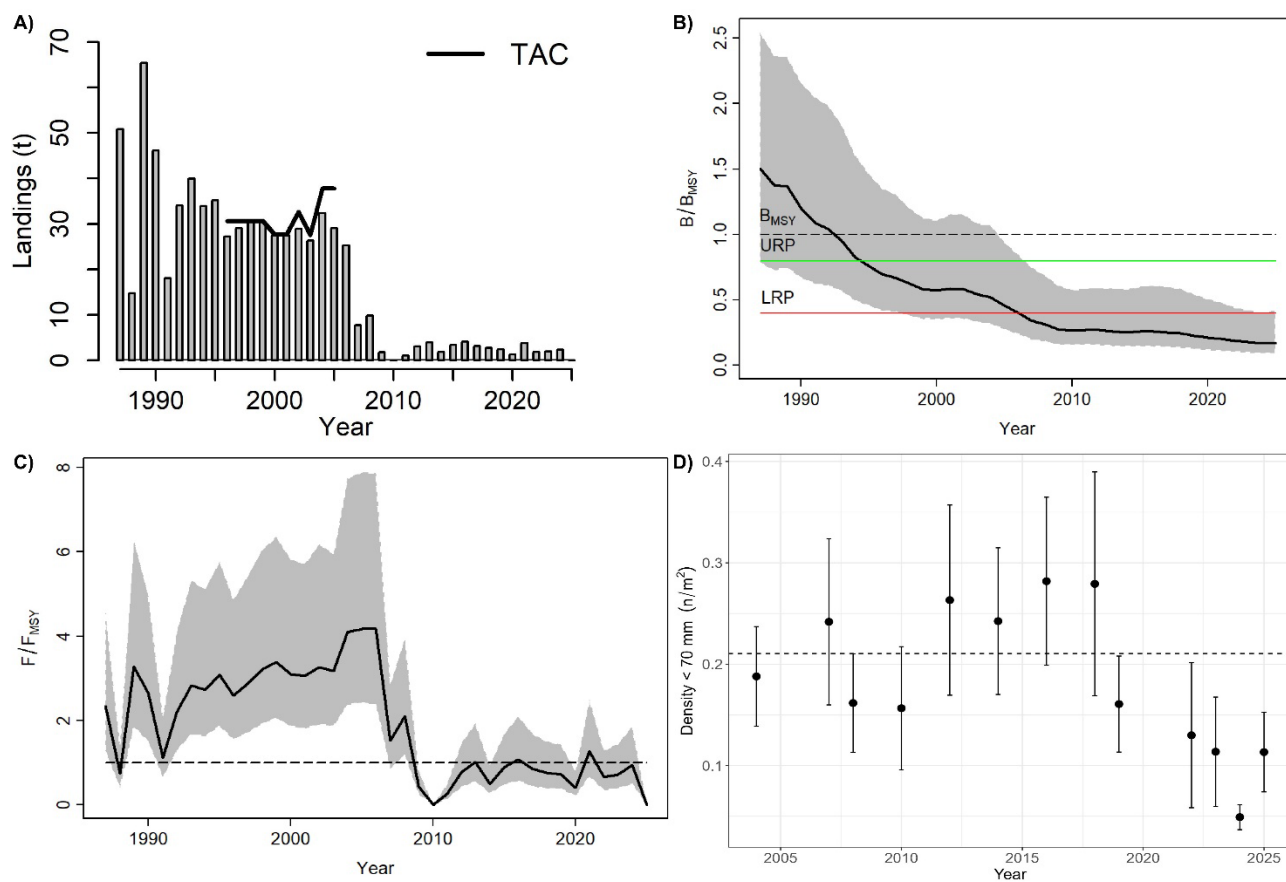


Figure 4. Area 16F. (A) Annual landings (t of meat) and total allowable catch (TAC); (B) stock status indicator (B/B_{MSY}). (C) Relative exploitation rate (F/F_{MSY}). (D) Density of Iceland scallop less than 70 mm in size. The dotted line represents the reference mean (1990–2022).

Landings

Landings peaked at 65 t in 1989 and then decreased (Figure 4A). From 1992 to 2006, they remained relatively stable, ranging between 25 t and 40 t. Since 2007, annual landings have never exceeded 10 t. In 2024, they totalled 2.39 t. In 2025, there was no fishery.

Biomass

Biomass has been decreasing since 1987 and has remained below the LRP since 2007 (Figure 4B). In 2025, B_{MSY} was estimated at 0.17, which corresponds to 43% of the LRP.

Exploitation Rate

The relative exploitation rate has been low and stable since 2009 compared with the previous period (Figure 4C). In 2025, there was no fishery.

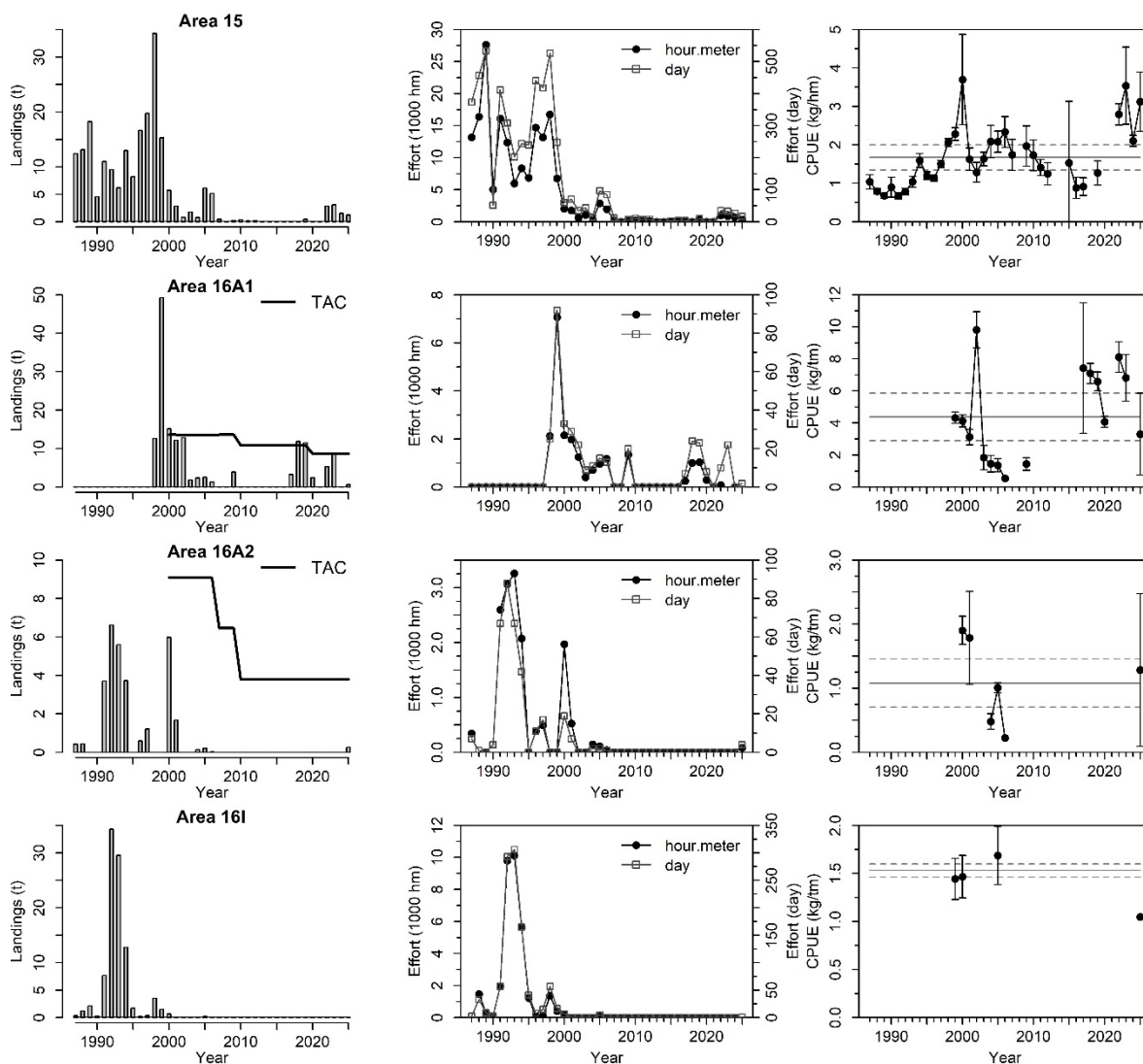
Recruitment

The density of Iceland scallops under 70 mm in size has remained low and below the reference mean (1990–2022) since 2019 (Figure 4D).

Current Status

Even though landings have been at historically low levels since 2017, the density of scallops under 70 mm in size has not shown any signs of improvement. The stock remains below the LRP and is therefore in the critical zone of the PA Framework with a probability of 97%.

Stock Status and Trends in Areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 16I, 18A, 18B1, 19A and 20B



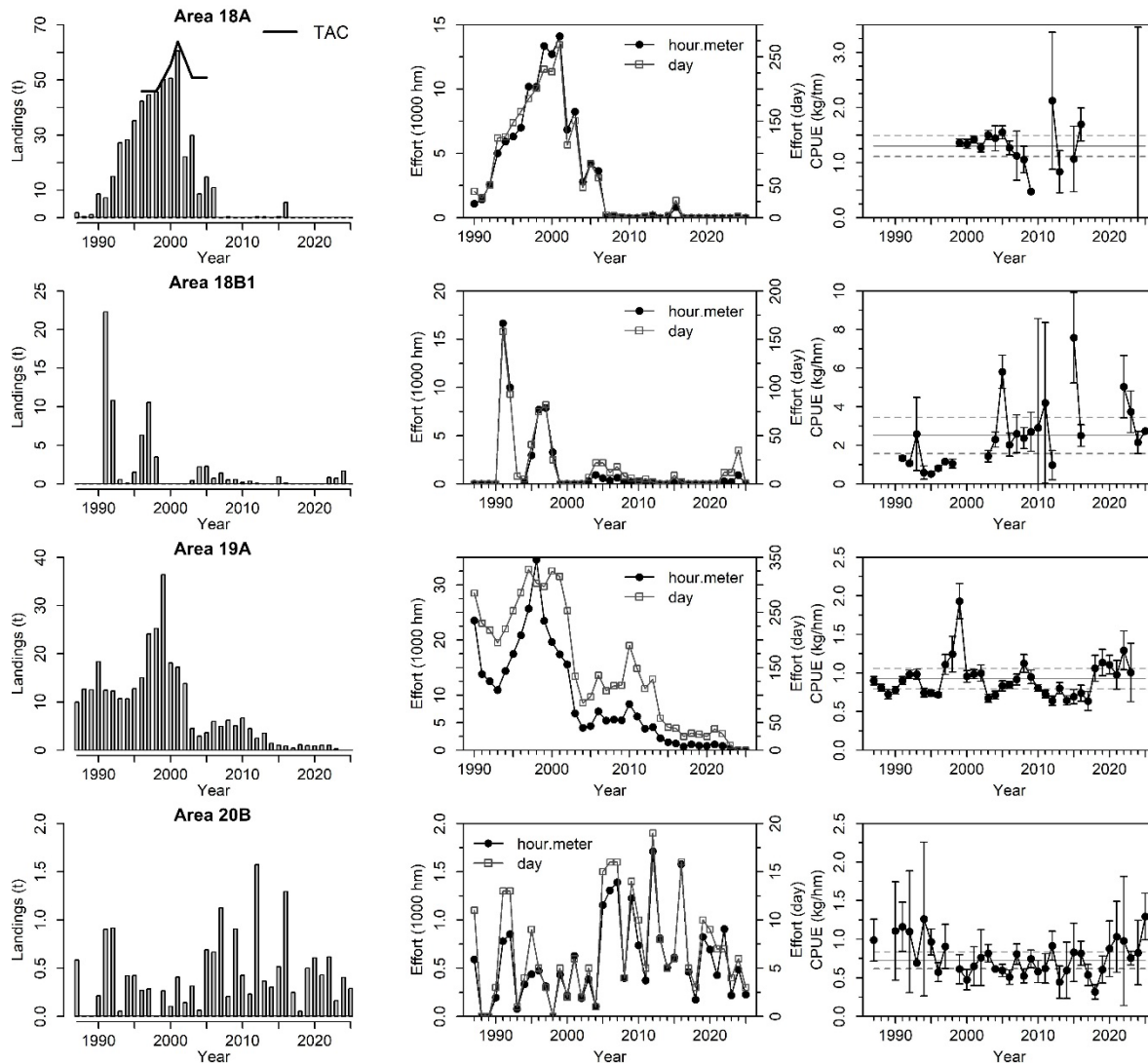


Figure 5. Areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 16I, 18A, 18B1, 19A and 20B. Left panels: Annual landings (t of meat) and total allowable catch (TAC); centre panels: effort in hour-metres and fishing days. Right panels: Annual catch per unit of effort (CPUE) in the commercial fishery. The CPUE for areas 15, 18B1, 19A and 20B is shown in kg/h·m (h·m = hour·metres), and the CPUE for areas 16A1, 16A2, 16I and 18A is shown in kg/t·m (t·m = tow·metres). The solid horizontal lines represent the reference mean (1990–2022) and the dashed lines, $\pm \frac{1}{2}$ standard deviation.

Landings

Landings peaked between the 1990s and early 2000s in all areas except Area 20B, where the peak occurred between 2007 and 2016 (Figure 5). Landings then fell sharply and became sporadic in most areas, with the exception of areas 15, 16A1 and 20B. In Area 15, an increase in landings has been observed since 2022, with an average in the past three years (2023–2025) of 1.95 t per year. Landings in Area 16A1 almost reached 12 t in 2018 and 2019 but declined thereafter and were very low in 2024 and 2025. Lastly, in Area 20B, landings have been near average values in recent years.

Effort

Fishing effort in each area follows the same trend as landings (Figure 5). Fishing effort peaked between the 1990s and the early 2000s. It then fell sharply and became sporadic or very low in most areas.

Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE)

The CPUE has varied across fishing areas over the years (Figure 5). The mean CPUE for the past three years (2023–2025) is above the reference mean (1992–2022) for areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 18B1, 19A and 20B, but below the reference mean for Area 16I. Area 18A has only been fished twice in the last three years, namely in 2024, and a trend cannot be identified because the high variability in yields increases the uncertainty in the CPUE.

Current Status

Over the past three years, landings and fishing effort in these areas have been low relative to the peaks reached between the 1990s and the early 2000s. CPUE values during the same period have been generally above or near the historical mean for these areas. It is not possible to assess the status of the resource in these areas because of low removal rates in recent years.

History of Landings

Landings have fluctuated since the start of the fishery in 1965. They peaked at 498 t in 1970 (Figure 6). During the 1960s and 1970s, landings came mainly from the Magdalen Islands. They then declined there but gradually rose on the North Shore, which became the province's main scallop fishing area from the late 1980s until 2009. Since 2010, most Quebec landings have come from Area 20A around the Magdalen Islands. Total landings in this sector have been increasing since 2021, reaching 65.5 t in 2025, or 92% of Quebec landings (71.1 t).

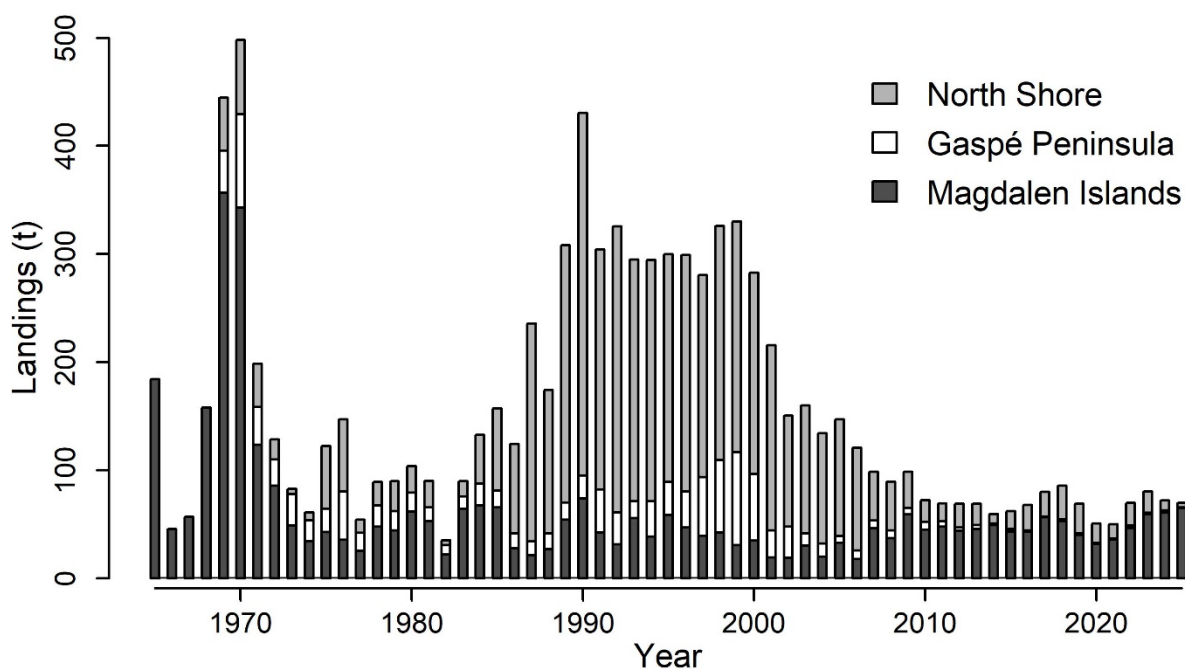


Figure 6. Total annual landings (t) of the commercial scallop fishery by marine sector.

Ecosystem and Climate Change Considerations

In recent years, rising sea surface temperatures and thinning sea ice have been observed (Dumas et al. in prep.).¹ In the Mingan region, a marked temperature increase has been noted in fall, while, in the Magdalen Islands, ice thickness is declining more rapidly than in the past, regardless of the season. On the North Shore, river flow varies significantly from year to year, with no clear trend. These changes could have an impact on larval survival and the composition of phytoplankton. If these conditions also affect the benthic environment, they could have an impact on the metabolism, growth, status and survival of juveniles and adults. However, their effect on stock productivity is poorly documented.

Scallops in Quebec's coastal waters show a certain degree of resilience to corrosive conditions, supported by nutrients. Two shell–environment patterns can be ascertained: a south-to-north latitudinal gradient (areas 20A to 15), along which shells become more elongated and thinner as the latitude increases, reflecting the less favourable growth conditions farther north, and a mesoscale pattern, characterized by increased weight and thickness, attributable to bottom acidification in areas 19A and 16A1.

Many 16A1 scallops have multiple layers at the edge of their shells, indicating significant environmental fluctuations (Couillard et al. in prep.).² Adult scallops in 19A and 20A are infested with shell-boring polychaetes (*Polydora websteri* and *Dipolydora concharum*), which weaken the shells and increase the energy costs of repair. Warmer temperatures may heighten this risk (Couillard et al. in prep.).³ Lastly, shell condition can influence survival and the allocation of resources to growth and reproduction.

Stock Advice

The stock in Area 20A has been in the healthy zone of the PA Framework since 2022. A high abundance of commercial-sized scallops and scallops larger than 70 mm was observed in all beds surveyed in 2024; the latter are expected to be available to the fishery in 2026. However, the low densities of sea scallops in the under 70 mm size class recorded in the 2023 and 2024 research surveys suggest that strong recruitment to the fishery is not anticipated in the medium term.

Stocks in areas 16E and 16F have remained in the PA critical zone for over 15 years. Despite the low fishing effort, there has been no noticeable improvement in these stocks. By contrast, in Area 16E, scallops less than 70 mm in size were observed in high abundance in 2025 in several beds. To promote recruitment to the fishery and improve stock status, it would be beneficial to protect the areas where these high abundances of small scallops have been observed.

The status of the resource in areas 15, 16A1, 16A2, 16I, 18A, 18B1, 19A and 20B cannot be determined because of low removal rates in recent years.

Decision Rule for Area 20A

The mean CPUE for the past two years (2.45 kg/h·m in 2024 and 2.65 kg/h·m in 2025) (Figure 1B) is greater than the proposed USR. In accordance with the decision rules for determining the maximum effort authorized (Figure 7), the preliminary maximum fishing effort for 2026, obtained from the primary indicator, is 230 days. An adjustment factor of +2.5% was used for effort, calculated by averaging the secondary indicators (+10% for the ≥ 100 mm, 85–99 mm and 70–84 mm size classes, and –20% for the < 70 mm size class). In accordance with the provisions for the healthy zone, a value of 230 days was retained, which corresponds to the lesser of the adjusted preliminary fishing effort (235.75 days) and the upper authorized limit (230 days). Fisheries Management will determine the authorized fishing effort for 2026.

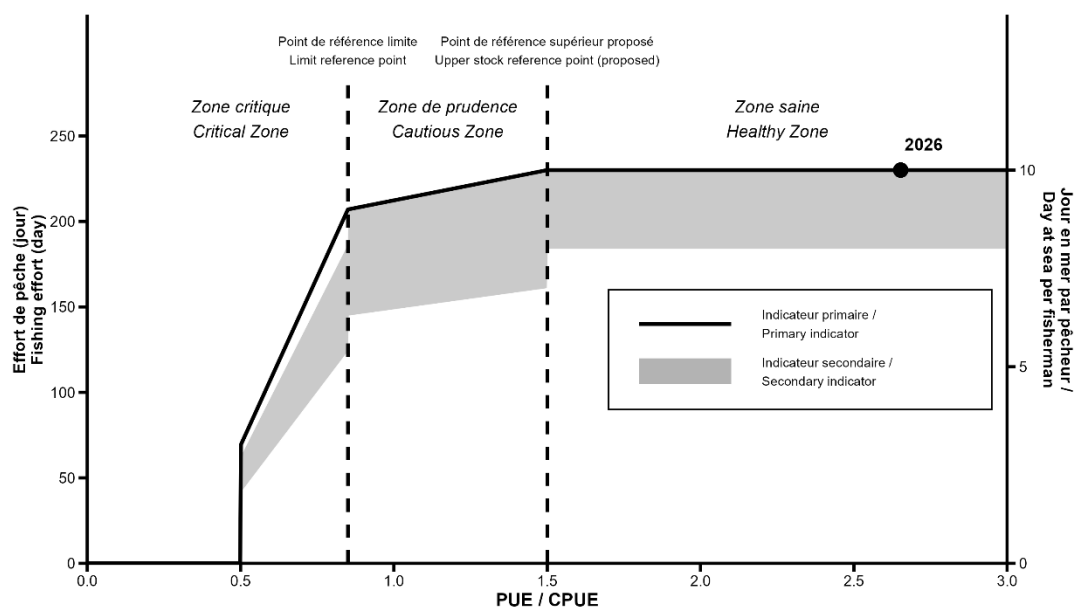


Figure 7. Maximum fishing effort authorized in 2026 under revised decision rules.

Projections for Areas 16E and 16F

Model projections for the next three years indicate that biomass will likely increase but remain in the critical zone under scenarios of less than 10 t and 2 t for areas 16E and 16F, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. 2025 and 2028 modelling projections for areas 16E and 16F under three catch scenarios. B/B_{MSY} is the predicted ratio of the biomass in a given year to the biomass at maximum sustainable yield, and “Critical Zone (%)” indicates the probability that the stock will be in the critical zone, depending on the year and scenario.

Area	Scenario	2025		2028	
		B/B_{MSY}	Critical Zone (%)	B/B_{MSY}	Critical Zone (%)
16E	C0	0.22	98.5	0.30	87.7
	C5	0.22	98.5	0.28	91.0
	C10	0.22	98.5	0.27	93.4
16F	C0	0.17	96.9	0.22	93.0
	C1	0.17	96.9	0.21	93.5
	C2	0.17	96.9	0.21	94.0

PROCEDURE FOR INTERIM-YEAR UPDATES

For Area 20A, a stock status update and a recommendation on the maximum fishing effort in accordance with the decision rules will be provided in interim years.

No updates will be provided for other fishing areas.

The next full assessment is scheduled for 2029.

OTHER MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

The conservation approach for managing the stock in Area 20A was developed in 2010 and revised in 2026, and is now aligned with the decision framework for fisheries using the PA.

A review of the decision rules began in 2025 in order to assess their effectiveness after 15 years of application. This follows the setting of an annual limit of 230 fishing days for the 2021–2025 fishing seasons, while the existing decision rules allowed for 252 to 430 fishing days per year during that period. The introduction of this limit has led to a rapid increase in the commercial CPUE, moving the primary indicator from the cautious zone to the healthy zone for 2021–2025. Following consultations, it was decided to maintain the limit and upper reference points, while setting a maximum authorized effort of 230 fishing days, rather than the 430-day ceiling provided for in the original decision rules.

SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

The stock advice for most fishing areas is based on very limited information, due to low fishing effort and the absence of recent, fishery-independent indicators.

Although the indicators and the surplus production model for areas 16E and 16F have been calculated for the entire areas fished since 1999, fishing effort; recruitment, growth and survival rates; temporal trajectories of scallop densities; muscle weight per scallop; and the timing of spawning can differ between beds within a given fishing area. Failure to consider the specific parameters for each bed could lead to overharvesting and localized depletions.

LIST OF MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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