



UPDATE OF STOCK STATUS INDICATOR FOR GREENLAND HALIBUT IN THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE (4RST) IN 2025

CONTEXT

The Fisheries Management Branch of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has requested an update of the stock status indicator for Greenland Halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (4RST) (Integrated Fisheries Management Plans for the [Quebec](#) and [Gulf](#) regions). This Fisheries Science Response Report is from the regional peer review of February 2, 2026, on the Update of Stock Status Indicators for the Gulf of St. Lawrence (4RST) Greenland Halibut in 2025.

SCIENCE ADVICE

Status

- The 2025 stock status indicator for Greenland Halibut, estimated at 7,320 t, is below the LRP with a very high probability, placing the stock in the critical zone of the Precautionary Approach (PA) for the first time since 1993.

Trends

- The stock status indicator has shown a declining trend since the mid-2000s and, in 2025, reached one of the lowest values in the time series beginning in 1990.

Ecosystem and Climate Change Considerations

- Ecosystem and climate change considerations were taken into account in the most recent stock assessment and were not re-examined as part of this update.

Stock Advice

- According to the harvest decision rule for this stock, landings from the directed commercial fishery should be 0 t, and bycatch of 4RST Greenland Halibut in other fisheries should be kept to the lowest possible level for the 2026–2027 fishing season.

BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Assessment Details

Year Assessment Approach was Approved

This assessment follows the framework developed in 2021 during the development of the precautionary approach for the Greenland halibut stock in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (GSL; DFO 2022).

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Assessment Type

Interim year update

Most Recent Assessment Date

1. Last Full Assessment: 2025 (DFO 2025, Chamberland et al. In prep.¹)
2. Last Interim-Year Update: 2023 (DFO 2024)

Stock Assessment Approach

1. Broad category: Index-based (trends in empirical index only)
2. Specific category: Index-based (fishery-independent index)

Stock Structure Assumption

Since 1993, Greenland halibut in the GSL has been recognized as an isolated population distinct from the main population in the Northwest Atlantic, based on the species composition of parasites (Arthur and Albert 1993). More recently, two genomic studies have shown the genetic distinction between the GSL and Northwest Atlantic populations (Carrier et al. 2020, Ferchaud et al. 2022). In addition, individuals found in the Laurentian Channel outside the GSL in the spring could belong to the GSL population according to a study on length at maturity (Yan et al. 2023).

Reference Points

- Limit Reference Point (LRP): 10,000 t of the biomass above 40 cm
- Upper Stock Reference (USR): 37,740 t of the biomass above 40 cm
- Target Reference Point (TRP): 47,170 t of the biomass above 40 cm
- Maximum Reference Relative Exploitation Rate (U_{max}): 6.51% when the stock is above the TRP

¹ Chamberland, J.-M., Isabel, L., and Benoît, H. In prep. Gulf of St. Lawrence (4RST) Greenland Halibut Stock Status in 2024. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Res. Doc.

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Harvest Decision Rule

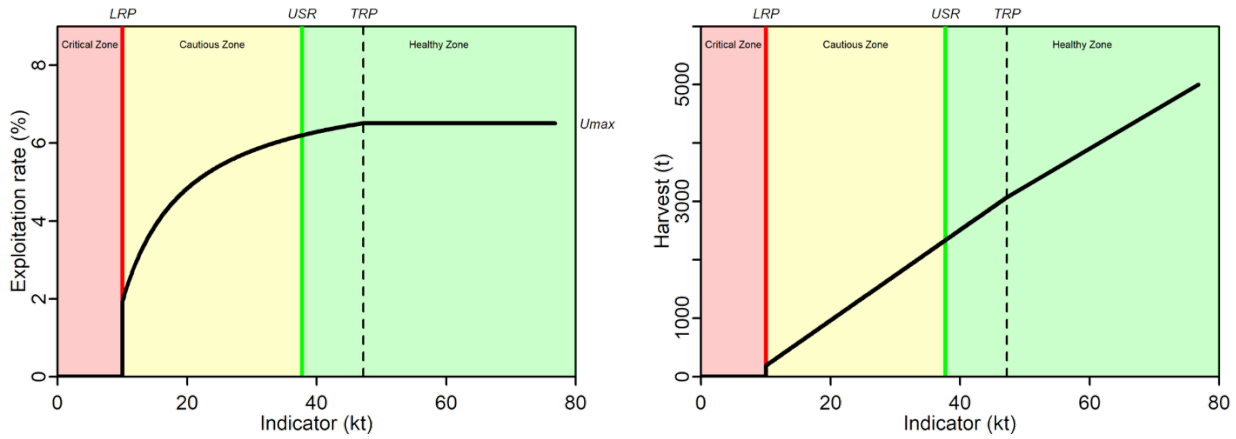


Figure 1. Harvest decision rule showing relative exploitation rate (left) and catch option (right) as a function of the stock status indicator. Reference points are shown on the graphs by the vertical lines, including the LRP and USR that define the three PA zones. U_{max} corresponds to the maximum reference relative exploitation rate.

Data

- Commercial landings: 1970-2025
- August Ecosystemic survey in the Estuary and northern Gulf of St. Lawrence (hereafter NGSL survey): 1990-2025

ASSESSMENT

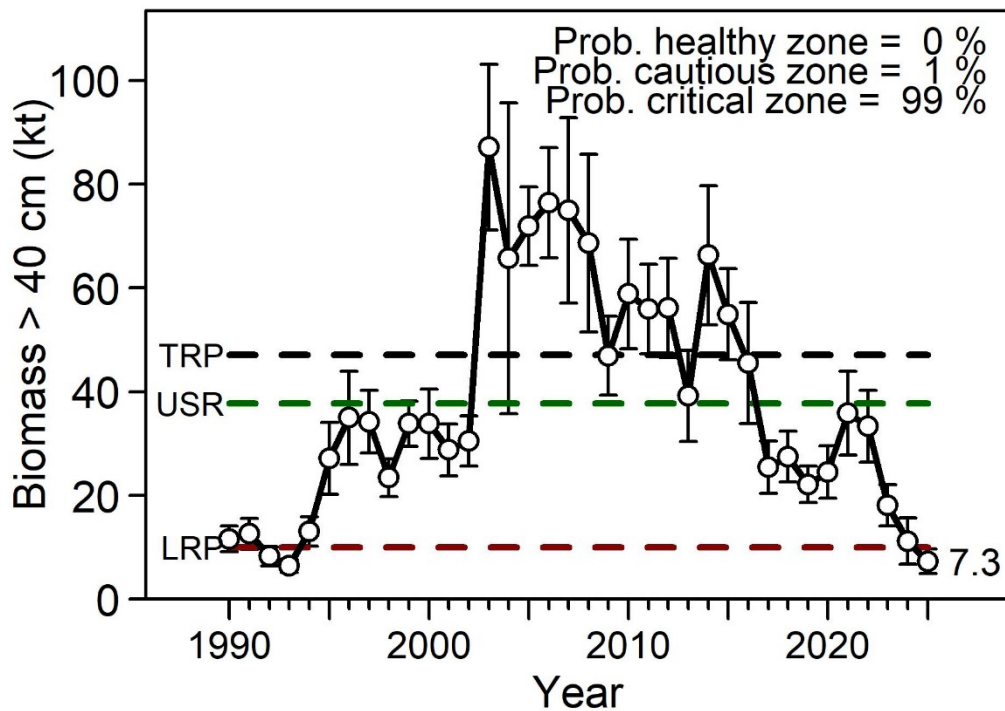


Figure 2. Stock status indicator (biomass > 40 cm, Kt) for 4RST Greenland halibut with 95% confidence intervals. The 2025 biomass value is indicated.

Stock Status and Trends

Biomass

The stock status indicator, defined as the biomass of fish larger than 40 cm estimated from the NGSL survey, has shown a declining trend since the mid-2000s. After remaining stable in the middle of the cautious zone from 2017 to 2020, it increased to reach values close to the USR in 2021 and 2022. Thereafter, it declined again, reaching in 2025 one of the lowest values (7,320 t) in the time series beginning in 1990. The indicator fell below the LRP for the first time since 1993 (Figure 2).

Current Status

In 2025, the stock has declined to below the LRP, placing it within the critical zone of the PA with very high probability (99%).

History of Landings

The directed gillnet fishery for Greenland Halibut developed starting in 1977. Landings reached peaks of over 8,000 t in 1979 and 1987, each time followed by sharp declines. Landings subsequently fluctuated between 2,000 and 4,000 t during the 1990s, decreased to about 1,300 t in the early 2000s, and remained between 3,000 and 4,000 t until 2016. Since 2017, landings have declined sharply and, in 2025–2026, reached the lowest value recorded since 1970, at 3.3 t (Table 1). In 2025-2026, more than 80% of landings came from bycatch in the directed Atlantic Halibut fishery.

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Since 1993, only fixed-gear fleets are authorized to participate in the directed Greenland Halibut fishery in the GSL, and usually more than 94% of landings originated from the gillnet fishery. A portion of the mobile-gear coastal fleet’s allocation was temporarily transferred each year to the fixed-gear fleets between 1993 and 2023–2024. Since 2024-2025, this transfer has been suspended.

Table 1. Landings, fixed gear fishing allocation (F-ALL) and TAC of the last six fishing seasons. Landing data : ZIFF last updated on 2026-01-12.

Management year	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
TAC (t)	2,250	2,025	2,400	2,400	2,000	290
F-All (t)	1,875	1,688	2,000	2,000	1,524	221
Landings (t)	1,454	1,203	1 001	159	12.7	3.3

Stock Advice

The stock status indicator has shown a declining trend since the mid-2000s and, in 2025, reached one of the lowest values in the time series beginning in 1990. The most recent scientific advice (DFO 2025) indicated that this trend would not reverse in the short term according to survey size structure information, and that the stock remained exposed to unfavourable environmental conditions. The stock status indicator for Greenland Halibut in the Gulf of St. Lawrence was below the LRP in 2025, placing the stock in the critical zone of the PA.

Harvest Decision Rule

According to the Harvest Decision Rule for this stock, since it is in the critical zone, landings from the directed commercial fishery should be 0 t, and bycatch of 4RST Greenland Halibut in other fisheries should be kept to the lowest possible level for the 2026–2027 fishing season.

SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

The sources of uncertainty were identified in the most recent stock assessment (DFO 2025) and were not re-examined as part of this update.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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*MPO. 2026. Mise à jour de l'indicateur de l'état du stock de flétan du Groenland du golfe du
Saint-Laurent (4RST) en 2025. Secr. can. des avis sci. du MPO. Rép. des Sci. 2026/013.*