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CANADA

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR COASTAL COMMUNITIES: ATTRIBUTION OF REDFISH QUOTAS AND EXPLORATORY LOBSTER FISHING LICENSES

**Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and
Oceans**

Patrick Weiler, Chair

**MARCH 2026
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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**Patrick Weiler
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS

has the honour to present its

FIFTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, the committee has studied the attribution of redfish quotas and exploratory lobster fishing licenses and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada establish, for Gulf shrimp harvesters, an economic viability plan for redfish including a trajectory towards sufficient volumes to achieve profitability, with an annual review based on actual operating costs and dockside prices. 12

Recommendation 2

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada review the redfish quota allocation framework to significantly increase the share allocated to Gulf shrimp harvesters and inshore fleets, and correspondingly reduce the share allocated to the offshore fleet when total allowable catch remains available. 13

Recommendation 3

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada monitor redfish fishing effort throughout the season and that, if it appears that a fleet will not catch its full total allowable catch by a pre-determined point in the season, a percentage of that total allowable catch be reallocated to a fleet that is active and likely to catch its full total allowable catch. 13

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, with the assistance of provinces and territories, establish a “markets and processing” initiative for the size of redfish found in Unit 1 as quickly as possible, including support for plant adaptation, product development, bait markets, promotion, and access to local and international markets. 16

Recommendation 5

That, in granting fishing rights to First Nations, Fisheries and Oceans Canada consider the fishing capacity of these communities. 19

Recommendation 6

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada, while continuing to prioritize fleets in difficulty when granting exploratory licences, also consider the situation of individual fishers within a fleet in difficulty by considering factors such as the debt linked to the recent purchase of a licence or registration of a fishing vessel or their access to another profitable stock through another fishing licence. 23

Recommendation 7

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada prioritize adjacency in fishery allocations to benefit local coastal communities, with the goal that resident fishers are prioritized in the granting of fishing rights in the sub-zones where they live. 24

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada make the completion and publication of a socio-economic study mandatory prior to any decision resulting in the allocation or reallocation of new access to a resource. This study must examine different allocation scenarios, including their impacts on regional economic benefits, employment in harvesting and processing, and the vitality of coastal communities that depend on these fisheries, to prevent an inequitable redistribution of benefits to the detriment of independent fishers and coastal regions. 24

Recommendation 9

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada issue a letter apologizing to pelagic fish harvesters in Lobster Fishing Areas 19 and 17 for leaving them out of the exploratory lobster licences and that those struggling fish harvesters be included in further decisions. 25

Recommendation 10

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada make licence and quota decisions based on science and socio-economic impact, not politics. 25

Recommendation 11

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in determining exploratory licence attributions, consult all affected fish harvesters. 28



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR COASTAL COMMUNITIES: ATTRIBUTION OF REDFISH QUOTAS AND EXPLORATORY LOBSTER FISHING LICENCES

INTRODUCTION

On 17 June 2025, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (the Committee) adopted a motion to “undertake a study of the process for allocating fishing rights, covering both the example of redfish quotas in 2024 and that of exploratory lobster fishing licences in 2024 and 2025.”¹ The motion also called for the testimony and documents received during the 1st Session of the 44th Parliament for the Committee’s study of the scales used by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to set redfish fishing quotas to be taken into consideration for this report.²

Between 25 September 2025 and 30 October 2025, the Committee heard testimony from 18 witnesses on the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery and the attribution of exploratory lobster fishing licences. It also received three briefs. Between 27 February 2024 and 23 May 2025, during the 44th Parliament, the Committee heard from 11 witnesses and received two briefs on the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery. The Committee thanks the witnesses for their contributions, and is pleased to present its final report, which includes the study’s findings and recommendations to the Government of Canada.

This report begins by briefly explaining how DFO makes decisions on reopening a fishery or opening a new fishery. The report then describes how these considerations were used during the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery in 2024 and the attribution of exploratory lobster fishing licences in 2024 and 2025.

1 House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO), *Minutes*, 17 June 2025.

2 On 15 February 2024, FOPO adopted a motion to “undertake a study of the scales used by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to set redfish quotas, in particular those announced by the Minister on Friday, 26 January 2024, in order to assess the extent of their effects on the shrimp fishing industry.”

See: FOPO, *Minutes*, 15 February 2024.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR DETERMINING FISHERIES RESOURCE ACCESS AND ALLOCATION

Scientific information can be used to determine the maximum total allowable catch (TAC) a particular species can sustainably support. The Committee heard that dividing that TAC between different groups of fishers is a “policy decision that must weigh multiple factors, including stakeholder input, economic considerations, community needs and reconciliation commitments.”³ As Adams Burns, DFO Assistant Deputy Minister of the Programs Sector, explained, there “is no defined mechanism in DFO policies to rank or weigh the various criteria in access and allocation decisions. However, with the adoption of the amended *Fisheries Act* in 2019, the considerations for deciding on an access and allocation key (among possible others) are contained directly in legislation.”⁴ Section 2.5 of the *Fisheries Act* lists the nine following elements that the Minister of Fisheries may consider when making decisions, including ones related to access and allocation keys:

- a) “the application of a precautionary approach and an ecosystem approach;
- b) the sustainability of fisheries;
- c) scientific information;
- d) Indigenous knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of Canada that has been provided to the Minister;
- e) community knowledge;
- f) cooperation with any government of a province, any Indigenous governing body and any body — including a co-management body — established under a land claims agreement;
- g) social, economic and cultural factors in the management of fisheries;
- h) the preservation or promotion of the independence of licence holders in commercial inshore fisheries; and

3 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

4 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

- i) the intersection of sex and gender with other identity factors.”⁵

As described in the following sections, some witnesses prioritized the various considerations listed above differently than DFO and disagreed with the department’s decisions on how to allocate quota in the reopened Unit 1 redfish fishery and the distribution of exploratory lobster fishing licences in the Gulf and Estuary of St. Lawrence.

The New Emerging Fisheries Policy

DFO developed the New Emerging Fisheries Policy (NEFP) in 1996, and updated it in 2008, to “clearly lay out the requirements that must be met and the procedures to follow before a new fishery can be initiated. A cornerstone of the new policy is provision for the establishment of a scientific base with which stock responses to new fishing pressures can be assessed.”⁶ The NEFP seeks to promote “[h]ealthy and abundant fishery resources supporting sustainable uses.” To achieve this, new fisheries “must provide for a reasonable scientific basis for their management.”⁷

The NEFP establishes three stages of development for new fisheries. During Stage I, or the preliminary feasibility stage, DFO issues scientific or experimental licences to

determine if harvestable quantities of the species/stock known to be present in a particular fishing area exist, if the species/stock can be captured by a particular gear type, identify multi-species and habitat impacts, if markets exist and, the best approach for proceeding further, e.g. to Stage II.⁸

During Stage II, or the exploratory phase, exploratory licences are issued to “determine whether a species/stock can sustain a commercially viable operation and to collect biological data in order to build a preliminary database on stock abundance and distribution.”⁹ The exploratory phase often lasts approximately five years.¹⁰ In some cases, the feasibility and exploratory stages can be combined.

5 [Fisheries Act](#), R.S.C., 1985, c. F-14, s. 2.5.

6 Government of Canada, [New Emerging Fisheries Policy](#).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.



Stage III, or the commercial stage, is reached “once it has been determined that a species/stock can sustain (commercially and biologically) commercial fishing operation.”¹¹

RECENT CASES

The following sections describe the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery in 2024, which had been closed since 1995, and the attribution of exploratory lobster fishing licences in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Lobster Fishing Area (LFA) 18 in 2024 and in LFAs 17 and 19 in 2025.

Both the reopening of the redfish fishery in 2024 and the attribution of exploratory lobster licences in 2024 and 2025 occurred in the context of a changing ecosystem in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which, due to climate change, is seeing warming water, lower oxygen levels and shifting species distributions.¹² Many fisheries, such as shrimp, whelk, snow crab and mackerel, are facing closures or reduced TACs due in part to these ecosystem changes. Fishers in these fleets hoped access to redfish or lobster could replace some or all of this lost income.¹³

The Committee heard that DFO should manage new or reopened fisheries in the context of a changing ecosystem carefully. As Ian MacPherson, executive director of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, explained: “Our margin of error is very thin, and opportunities for expanded or new fisheries must not be squandered away. These opportunities require proper planning, oversight and the singular focus of protecting the resource under consideration.”¹⁴ Dominique Robert, professor and Canada Research Chair in fisheries ecology at the Institut des sciences de la mer of the Université du Québec à Rimouski, agreed, stating that “[r]apid changes in the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, including rising temperatures and falling oxygen levels, will certainly lead to other difficult situations” for other fisheries and proposed that increased resilience is needed in the

11 Government of Canada, *New Emerging Fisheries Policy*.

12 Bernard Vigneault, Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, DFO, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024; and Dominique Robert, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Fisheries Ecology, Institut des sciences de la mer, Université du Québec à Rimouski, As an individual, *Evidence*, 29 February 2024.

13 Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, *Evidence*, 29 February 2024; Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, *Evidence*, 7 October 2025; Ghislain Collin, President, Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, *Evidence*, 7 October 2025; and Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator, As an individual, *Evidence*, 21 October 2025.

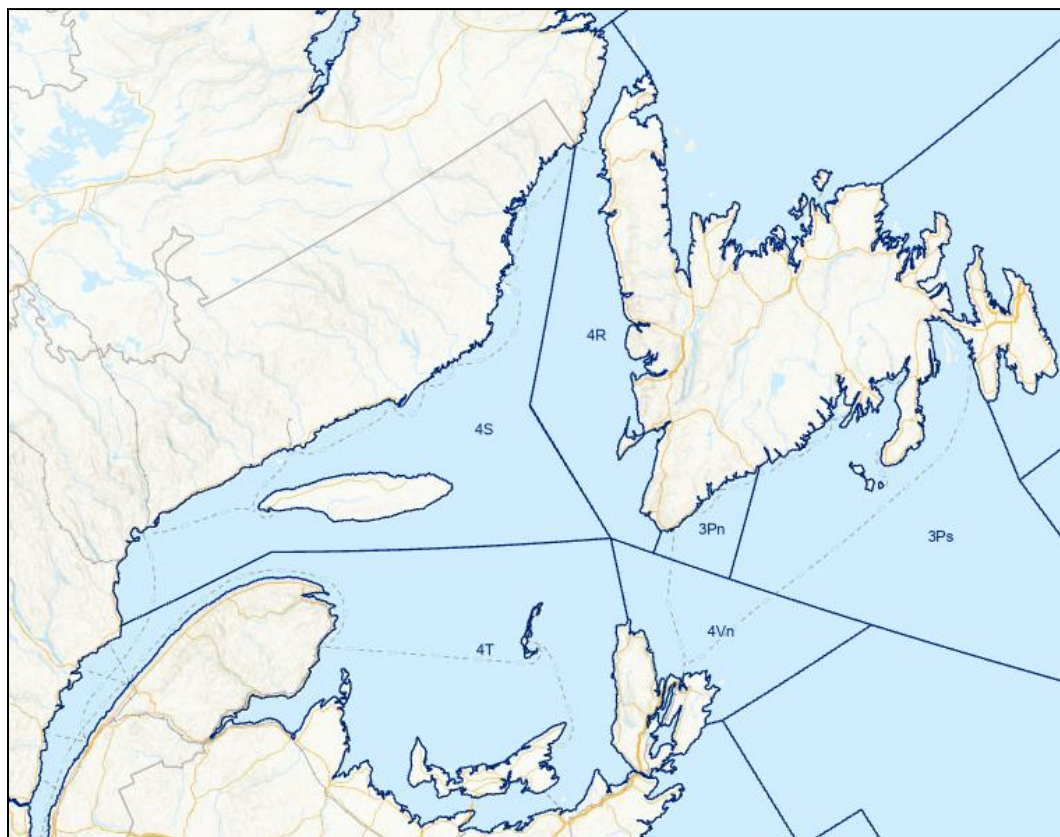
14 Ian MacPherson, Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, *Evidence*, 7 October 2025.

fisheries sector in the longer term to avoid damage to the economies of coastal communities in five provinces.¹⁵

Reopening of the Unit 1 Redfish Fishery in 2024

Figure 1 shows the redfish stock management areas in the Gulf of St. Lawrence that are part of Unit 1. It consists of Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) divisions 4RST all year and divisions 3Pn + 4Vn between 1 January and 31 May.

Figure 1—Unit 1 Redfish Stock Management Areas



Source: Prepared in 2025 using data from Government of Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, [NAFO Subareas, Divisions, and Subdivisions](#), Natural Resources Canada, Federal Geospatial Platform, 12 November 2025.

15 Dominique Robert, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Fisheries Ecology, Institut des sciences de la mer, Université du Québec à Rimouski, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.



Redfish grow slowly, with some fish reaching at least 80 years of age.¹⁶ It usually takes seven to eight years for redfish to reach the minimum legal size of 22 centimetres.¹⁷ In 2011, 2012 and 2013, particularly large numbers of redfish were born. These fish survived the juvenile stage and have significantly increased redfish biomass in Unit 1 since 2016.¹⁸ In 2021, the redfish biomass was estimated to be 3.2 million tonnes (t) and accounted for 82% of the biomass sampled in Unit 1 during the 2021 DFO research survey. Between 1995 and 2012, redfish accounted for 15% of the sampled biomass.¹⁹

On 26 January 2024, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard announced the opening of Unit 1 Redfish for the first time in over 25 years. The initial announcement stated that the TAC would be a minimum of 25,000 t.²⁰ In 2024 and 2025, the TAC was set at 60,000 t.²¹

Allocation of the Total Allowable Catch of Unit 1 Redfish Between Fleets

Speaking to the Committee in February 2024, before the first fishing season after the reopening, Adam Burns described the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery as follows:

The recent increase in redfish biomass and the move to a commercial fishery is a good news story, but not without its challenges. The reopening of the fishery offers a unique opportunity to do things differently given the socio-economic changes since the moratorium, particularly with respect to advancing [I]ndigenous reconciliation. The department undertook consultations in 2021 and 2022 with [I]ndigenous groups and a range of stakeholders from eastern Canada. Participants were offered several opportunities to provide views on access, allocation and the principles they believed were important for the minister to consider in her decision.²²

DFO considered the 2024 redfish fishery to be a reopening of the fishery and used the historic allocation key as a “starting point,” before considering factors such as adjacency,

16 DFO, *Status of Redfish Stocks in the Northwest Atlantic: Redfish in Units 1, 2, and 3, and in Division 30*, DFO Science, Stock Status Report A1-01(1999), December 1999, p. 2.

17 DFO, *Redfish (Sebastes mentella and S. fasciatus) Stocks Assessment in Units 1 and 2 in 2019*, Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS), Science Advisory Report 2020/019, March 2020, p. 3.

18 DFO, *Redfish (Sebastes mentella and Sebastes fasciatus) Stocks Assessment in Units 1 and 2 in 2021*, CSAS, Science Advisory Report 2022/039, September 2022, p. 1.

19 Ibid., p. 4.

20 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

21 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025.

22 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

historic dependence, the need for dedicated Indigenous access and increased opportunities for other fleets in difficulty.²³ To determine quota allocations, DFO considered the catch history of the various fleets; however since no fishers had an economic dependence on Unit 1 redfish after a roughly 30-year closure, the Minister “took the opportunity to further the government’s objectives.”²⁴ As Todd Williams, DFO Senior Director of Fisheries Resource Management Operations, explained, “all of the reallocation essentially came from the offshore component for the shrimp and [I]ndigenous organizations.”²⁵

Todd Williams described the decisions DFO made to establish the new allocation key with “some level of fairness:”

We do know that in the offshore sector, those harvesters continued to have those licences and make business decisions based on those. Even though there was a moratorium, there was intrinsic value in those licences. We do know that others in the inshore, for example, with groundfish licences, avail themselves to other species. In terms of the shrimp harvesters, it was deemed that [10%] would be an appropriate amount of quota in addition to the fact that we do have a reserve allocation that is available to anyone.²⁶

The allocation of the Unit 1 redfish TAC in 2024 and 2025 was:

- 58.69% for the offshore mobile gear fleet (vessels more than 100');
- 14.84% for the inshore mobile gear fleet (vessels less than 65');
- 5.72% for the midshore mobile gear fleet (vessels between 65' and 100');
- 0.75% for the inshore fixed gear fleet, which primarily use it for bycatch;
- 10% for the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence shrimp harvesters, who are inshore and midshore harvesters; and

23 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

24 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

25 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

26 Ibid.



- 10% for Indigenous communities and organizations, if they have mobile gear and a groundfish licence.²⁷

Jean Lanteigne, General Director of the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, took issue with the use of historical allocations, believing that it went counter to the objective under the *Fisheries Act* to “keep the benefits of the fishery in the hands of independent fishers and their region” as well as ignoring licensing principles in the Gulf Licensing Policy.²⁸ In February 2024, Claudio Bernatchez, Director General of the Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie, called the redfish allocation key “disastrous.”²⁹ Dominique Robert believed the consideration of the historic allocation was appropriate since the approach had been used in other fisheries.³⁰

Allocation to Shrimpers

The Committee heard about the difficulties faced by Gulf shrimpers in the years before the reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery. Increasingly unfavourable conditions for shrimp, including warming water and lower oxygen levels in deep waters, coupled with increased redfish predation have contributed to the decline of shrimp.³¹ Some witnesses believed redfish predation was the most important cause for the decline of shrimp.³² Jean Lanteigne described how his organization had been sounding the alarm to DFO about the impact of redfish on shrimp since 2011. He also noted that DFO’s science team had also noted negative impacts as early as 2016.³³

Adam Burns explained that it is “very difficult” to calculate the amount of redfish that would be necessary to compensate shrimpers for their losses due to the dwindling number of shrimp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The difficulty is caused by “variables that

27 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; and Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

28 Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

29 Claudio Bernatchez, Director General, Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

30 Dominique Robert, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Fisheries Ecology, Institut des sciences de la mer, Université du Québec à Rimouski, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

31 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

32 Patrice Element, General Manager, Quebec Office of Shrimp Fishermen, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; and Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

33 Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

are outside the department's control in terms of market value and individual enterprise costs to operate, as examples.”³⁴

The Committee did hear proposed quantities from another witness. Jean Lanteigne shared that his coalition of shrimpers from New Brunswick, Quebec and the West Coast of Newfoundland had asked for priority access to redfish with a minimum TAC of 25,000 t and 2 million pounds per fishing operation to ensure profitability.³⁵ He highlighted that “shrimp is the only resource for most shrimpers.”³⁶ Jean Lanteigne told the Committee that, with 10% of the Unit 1 redfish TAC, shrimp harvesters “can't afford to buy trawls and modify their boats to practise this type of fishing” since it would represent one or possibly two trips out to sea.³⁷

Witnesses highlighted the importance of the shrimp fleet for rural economies.³⁸ Patrice Element, general manager of the Quebec Office of Shrimp Fishermen, told the Committee that the “possibility of partially replacing the shrimp fishery with the redfish fishery” would give communities which depend on Northern shrimp fishing and processing in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick some “hope for better days once that emerging fishery reaches cruising speed and processors have developed or recovered lucrative markets for that new fish.” He also argued that redfish were a lifeline for shrimpers while “offshore fishers can still prosper without those quotas.”³⁹

Jean Lanteigne said that the shrimpers felt misled after assurances made in 2018 that their fleet would be prioritized in the reopening of a redfish fishery were not honoured.⁴⁰

34 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

35 Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

36 Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

37 Ibid.

38 Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; and Claudio Bernatchez, Director General, Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

39 Patrice Element, General Manager, Quebec Office of Shrimp Fishermen, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

40 Jean Lanteigne, General Director, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.



Recommendation 1

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada establish, for Gulf shrimp harvesters, an economic viability plan for redfish including a trajectory towards sufficient volumes to achieve profitability, with an annual review based on actual operating costs and dockside prices.

Allocation to the Offshore Fleet

Many witnesses questioned why almost 60% of the TAC was allocated to the offshore sector made up of large companies rather than independent harvesters. They worried that fewer economic benefits would be going to coastal communities and that larger vessels had a higher risk of bycatch and other ecosystem impacts.⁴¹ Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, highlighted that “the landings of the offshore fleet are not subject to minimum processing requirements. They concentrate profits with other corporations and not workers, and the offshore is already the largest quota holder for fisheries in Canada.”⁴²

Adam Burns explained that, while some of the previous offshore quota was transitioned to Indigenous groups and Gulf shrimp harvesters, TAC was still assigned to the offshore fleet since it is

crewed by individuals from coastal communities in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and that those businesses and the processing facilities associated with them are located in coastal communities in Atlantic Canada and Quebec so that the fleet's revenue and business activities do indeed go to support coastal communities.⁴³

For example, Carey Bonnell, Vice-President of Sustainability and Engagement at Ocean Choice Internal, described the company as a “family-owned Newfoundland and Labrador seafood company” whose operations “support 1,400 employees across 300 communities throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.”⁴⁴

Sylvie Lapointe, President of the Atlantic Groundfish Council, shared that the offshore sector had “come to accept the decision” made by Minister Lebouthilier to reduce the

41 Patrice Element, General Manager, Quebec Office of Shrimp Fishermen, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; Jean Lanteigne, General Director, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025; and Guy Gallant, Fish Harvester, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

42 Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

43 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

44 Carey Bonnell, Vice-President, Sustainability and Engagement, Ocean Choice International, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

sector's historical share but "strongly" believed that they were not the right decisions since people invest and banks lend money based on allocated shares. She believed that when "access and allocation are destabilized, there are no winners, and it's not a good way to proceed."⁴⁵

Sylvie Lapointe reassured the Committee that the fishing practices in the offshore sector have evolved in the last 30 years to become more sustainable.⁴⁶ She also shared that, although the offshore sector has licences for vessels over 100 feet, the majority of vessels are much smaller and there were only four to six vessels over 100 feet in the fleet at the time of her testimony in May 2024 – including two vessels active in Newfoundland and one active in Nova Scotia.⁴⁷ Todd Williams told the Committee that, as of September 2025, "no vessel over 100 feet has caught fish in unit 1."⁴⁸

Recommendation 2

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada review the redfish quota allocation framework to significantly increase the share allocated to Gulf shrimp harvesters and inshore fleets, and correspondingly reduce the share allocated to the offshore fleet when total allowable catch remains available.

Recommendation 3

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada monitor redfish fishing effort throughout the season and that, if it appears that a fleet will not catch its full total allowable catch by a pre-determined point in the season, a percentage of that total allowable catch be reallocated to a fleet that is active and likely to catch its full total allowable catch.

Timing of Reopening

The Committee heard that redfish "has episodic recruitment, so it's not a regular cycle of new fish coming into the fishable biomass" and must therefore be managed "in a way that spreads out the harvest, because when you take fish out this year, they won't be there next year, and won't be replaced instantly through the regular recruitment that we

45 Sylvie Lapointe, President, Atlantic Groundfish Council, [Evidence](#), 23 May 2024.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.



see among a lot of other species.”⁴⁹ Particularly high numbers of redfish were born in 2011, 2012 and 2013. These are the fish currently being harvested in Unit 1.

Adam Burns described the various viewpoints heard during consultations before the opening, ranging from those who desired to reopen the fishery quickly to those who preferred to wait until the redfish were larger to improve their marketability.⁵⁰

For reasons that remain unclear, redfish in Unit 1 are not reaching their usual size and so are not reaching sizes large enough for fillets.⁵¹ A recent update on the state of the Unit 1 redfish stocks shows that redfish have remained at a size of 24 to 25 cm since 2021.⁵² This lack of future growth is one of the reasons why the Minister decided to reopen the fishery in 2024.⁵³ The biomass of redfish in Unit 1 is expected to decline to 10% of the 2023 biomass within six to nine years depending on fishing intensity.⁵⁴

Markets for Unit 1 Redfish

During the 2024 season, approximately 5%, or 3,000 t, of the 60,000 t quota was landed by 23 licence holders. Partway through the 2025 season, just over 4%, or 2,500 t, of the 60,000 t quota had been landed by 15 licence holders across all fleets.⁵⁵ In September 2025, landings from the 2025 season were on pace to exceed the landings of the 2024 season.⁵⁶

The Unit 1 redfish fishery is a volume fishery that operates on very thin margins. Fishers receive “about 20¢ to 30¢ a pound at the wharf.”⁵⁷ Jean Lanteigne and Guy Gallant, fish harvester appearing as an individual, told the Committee that the low price for redfish

49 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

50 Ibid.

51 Bernard Vigneault, Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

52 DFO, [Unit 1 Redfish \(Sebastes mentella and S. fasciatus\) Update in 2023](#), CSAS, Science Response 2024/008, February 2024, p. 5.

53 Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, DFO, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

54 DFO, [Unit 1 Redfish \(Sebastes mentella and S. fasciatus\) Update in 2023](#), CSAS, Science Response 2024/008, February 2024, p. 9.

55 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

combined with low TACs for each fisher leads to unprofitable conditions.⁵⁸ Guy Gallant told the Committee that he spent over a million dollars rebuilding his vessel in anticipation of the reopening of the redfish fishery that was awaited with very high expectations in the years preceding the reopening. He felt that the reopened fishery, with a low price per pound and a small amount of redfish available to catch per fisher, had not met those expectations : “to say it's unviable is an understatement”.⁵⁹ Dominique Robert explained that, due to the much higher price received for shrimp, a shrimper would need to land much higher quantities of redfish to compensate for the loss of shrimp but believed that “[s]uch landings are probably not viable in the short term, because of the lack of markets for the resource, or sustainable in the long term, given the high natural mortality that is causing a rapid decline in the redfish stock.”⁶⁰

The Committee heard about the work needed to equip processing plants and develop markets. Ian MacPherson relayed a conversation with processors who were “very interested” in adding processing capacity for redfish to their operations but “if they don't know that there is a secure supply coming, it's pretty hard to go out and make that investment.” He added that the five-year period of uncertainty on when the redfish fishery would open could have contributed to hesitations to make substantial investments.⁶¹

As a result of Unit 1 redfish not growing larger than 24 to 25 cm, the markets for larger redfish are not available to Unit 1 redfish. Carey Bonnell expressed disappointment that, in the Gulf, “it doesn't look like this fish is going to grow to a size that's going to be globally competitive” and so “you have to make do with what you have.”⁶² As Claudio Bernatchez explained: “There are more fish and quota than can be fished, not because we cannot fish but because there is no one to buy it.”⁶³ Jean Lanteigne believed that “[i]t

58 Jean Lanteigne, General Director, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025; and Guy Gallant, Fish Harvester, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

59 Guy Gallant, Fish Harvester, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

60 Dominique Robert, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Fisheries Ecology, Institut des sciences de la mer, Université du Québec à Rimouski, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

61 Ian MacPherson, Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

62 Carey Bonnell, Vice-President, Sustainability and Engagement, Ocean Choice International, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

63 Claudio Bernatchez, Director General, Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.



will take a real marketing effort to bring the price up so that, in the medium term, we can make this redfish fishery profitable.”⁶⁴

Carey Bonnell described the difficulties associated with filleting small redfish, a very bony fish. Since most redfish available on global markets exceed 40 cm in length, Canadian producers are at a disadvantage in the fillet market. As a result, markets for whole round redfish and headed and gutted redfish are being explored as the fillet market is difficult to access.⁶⁵

Witnesses described efforts to develop markets for Unit 1 redfish in Canada, the United States, China, Korea, Japan and North Africa.⁶⁶ The European market generally prefers larger fillets than the sizes currently reached by Unit 1 redfish, but work is being done to grow the European market.⁶⁷

As another possible market, the Committee heard that small Unit 1 redfish could make good bait.⁶⁸ Guy Gallant believed that redfish could be used in pot fisheries such as lobster and crab:

The size that this redfish is now makes for perfect bait. You couldn't ask for any better. It stands up well. It's attractive to the lobsters and the crab. That alone is a massive market, and that's only here in Atlantic Canada. There are pot fishers globally. I would imagine it would be quite attractive as a lower-cost bait for those fisheries.⁶⁹

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, with the assistance of provinces and territories, establish a “markets and processing” initiative for the size of redfish found in Unit 1 as quickly as possible, including support for plant adaptation, product development, bait markets, promotion, and access to local and international markets.

64 Jean Lanteigne, General Director, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

65 Carey Bonnell, Vice-President, Sustainability and Engagement, Ocean Choice International, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

66 Alain d'Entremont, President, Scotia Harvest Inc., [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025; and Carey Bonnell, Vice-President, Sustainability and Engagement, Ocean Choice International, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

67 Alain d'Entremont, President, Scotia Harvest Inc., [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

68 Ibid.

69 Guy Gallant, Fish Harvester, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

Attribution of Exploratory Lobster Fishing Licences in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 2024 and 2025

Todd Williams testified that lobster “is one of the few species that appears to benefit from warming waters. Indicators of lobster abundance are increasing across most fishing areas in Quebec.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Maryse Lemire, DFO Regional Director of Fisheries Management and Aquaculture for the Quebec Region, stated that scientific surveys and stock assessments “show that the resource is healthy” and that abundance and landing indicators “have been increasing in recent years.”⁷¹ However, as described later in this report, the Committee also heard that no scientific data was available for certain sub-areas in LFA 19 covering 140 km of coastline between Rimouski and Capucins.⁷² According to DFO statistics, 586 commercial lobster licences were issued in Quebec in 2023.⁷³ That same year, 14,466 t of lobster worth \$242 million were landed in Quebec.⁷⁴

With a view to potentially expanding this commercial fishery, DFO launched a knowledge acquisition and lobster fishery development plan in LFAs 17, 18 and 19 (Figure 2). According to Todd Williams:

This initiative is centred on exploratory fishing, with participants required to carefully document the characteristics of their catches. This cautious, evidence-based approach will help determine whether the stock can sustainably support additional commercial harvesting. It also presents a valuable opportunity for diversification among new licence holders. As part of the project, the department issued 74 exploratory fishing licences for areas 17, 18 and 19 that are located in the estuary and the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence. Exploratory fishing began in May 2024 in area 18, and areas 17 and 19 followed in May 2025.⁷⁵

70 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

71 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

72 Ibid.

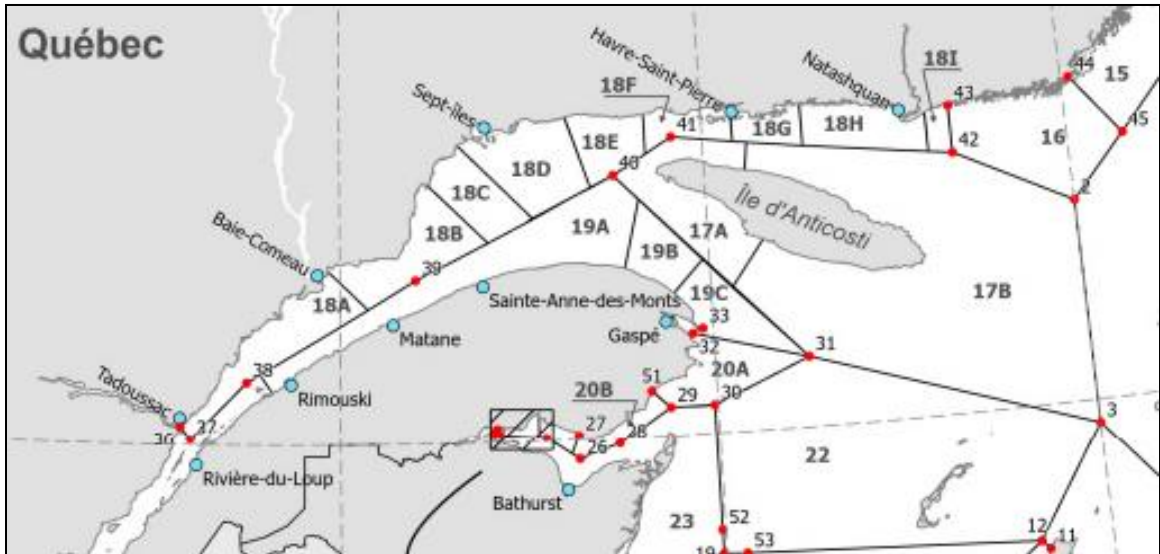
73 Government of Canada, *Species Information*, “[Number of species licences issued by province and region, 2023.](#)”

74 Government of Canada, *Seafisheries landed quantity by province, 2023*, “[2023 Atlantic & Pacific coasts commercial landings by province \(metric tonnes, live weight\)](#)”; and Government of Canada, *Seafisheries landed value by province, 2023*, “[2023 Value of Atlantic & Pacific coast commercial landings, by province \(thousand dollars\).](#)”

75 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.



Figure 2—Lobster Fishing Areas in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence



Source: Excerpt of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, [Québec and Gulf Regions: Fishing Areas for lobster](#).

The exploratory phase of a new fishery usually lasts “at least five years,” as data is collected and analyzed, though, as Maryse Lemire explained, its duration can “vary depending on how the resource responds and the information [DFO gets] about how the fishery is working, fishers' observations and so on.”⁷⁶

Part of DFO’s guidelines for developing the plan to allocate exploratory lobster fishing licences (part of Stage II of the NEFP) was “to prioritize the [F]irst [N]ations, struggling fleets and the next generation.”⁷⁷ Maryse Lemire explained that DFO identified priority fleets through consultations with “associations representing the three marine sectors in order to fully understand the realities and challenges faced by each sector.”⁷⁸

DFO aimed to grant approximately 50% of exploratory licences to First Nations as communal exploratory licences and 50% of exploratory licences to individual owner-operators.⁷⁹ In the Côte-Nord region, the Indigenous population represents

76 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

DFO issues communal licences to a bands, band councils, tribal councils or organizations representing a territorially based aboriginal community pursuant to the [Aboriginal Communal Fishing Licences Regulations](#).

approximately 17% of the total population.⁸⁰ In the Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine region, the Indigenous population represents approximately 14% of the total population.⁸¹ DFO granted the following proportions of traps to First Nations through communal exploratory licences: 50% in LFA 17 (representing 2,250 out of 4,500 traps), 52% in LFA 18 (representing 3,250 out of 6,250 traps) and 55% in LFA 19 (representing 4,250 out of 7,750 traps).⁸² In response to a question asking why DFO had allocated a large proportion of exploratory licences to First Nations in LFAs 17, 18 and 19 in proportion to their demographic weight, Maryse Lemire answered: “The [F]irst [N]ations were prioritized.”⁸³ Maryse Lemire acknowledged that Indigenous communities must rely on non-Indigenous fishers to exercise their new fishing rights. Maryse Lemire explained that the regulation on Indigenous communal fishing permits allows this practice.⁸⁴

Recommendation 5

That, in granting fishing rights to First Nations, Fisheries and Oceans Canada consider the fishing capacity of these communities.

Most witnesses welcomed the development of an exploratory fishery in LFAs 17, 18 and 19 but generally disagreed with at least one element of how it had been implemented or currently exists.

Scientific Evidence

The Committee heard that increasing quantities of lobster had been observed in LFAs 17, 18 and 19 in the years before the exploratory licences were attributed. Camille Gagné, captain-owner-operator appearing as an individual, described finding large quantities of

80 Government of Canada, *Indigenous communities in Quebec*; and Gouvernement du Québec, *Portrait socioéconomique de la Côte-Nord*.

The Indigenous population includes the Innu First Nations from Pessamit, Essipit, Ekuanitshit, Nutashkuan, Pakuashipi, Unamen Shipu and Uashat mak Mani-Utenam.

81 Government of Canada, *Indigenous communities in Quebec*; and Gouvernement du Québec, *Portrait socioéconomique de la Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine*.

The Indigenous population includes Mi'gmaq First Nations of Gespeg, Gescapegiag and Listuguj; and Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk First Nation.

82 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.



lobster in her crab traps in 2022 and 2023: “we counted as many lobsters as crabs in my traps. In some places, there were only lobsters. We informed the associations and told DFO that the situation wasn't normal.”⁸⁵ Guy Vigneault, director of Shipek Fisheries at Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, said that “a lot of lobsters” were found in LFA 18 because of climate change.⁸⁶

Although anecdotal observations of lobster had been made, witnesses had different opinions on whether sufficient and appropriate scientific information was available, and used, in the decision to develop an exploratory lobster fishery. For example, although experimental fishing of lobster had occurred in some areas of LFA 19, there were certain sub-areas covering 140 km of coastline between Rimouski and Capucins where there “had never been any fishing.”⁸⁷ O'neil Cloutier, director of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, relayed that, in 2024, “DFO verbally confirmed to us that there was no objective scientific evidence to support the significant increase in the 7,750 exploratory traps for the planned data harvesting” in LFA 19.⁸⁸ Maryse Lemire explained that, since there had never been any fishing in certain sub-areas in LFA 19, exploratory lobster licences were distributed “using a cautious approach. It was implemented in phases, gradually. That way, if any negative signals had been observed, the plan could have been adjusted.”⁸⁹ Daniel Malec, director of economic development at Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, stated that some scientific fisheries (part of Stage I of the NEFP) had occurred in LFA 18.⁹⁰

Witnesses shared their opinions on the risks of increasing lobster fishing. O'neil Cloutier was concerned by the increased fishing effort, warning that suddenly increasing fishing effort “without any conclusive scientific data can endanger the resource and the current fishers who depend on it. We do not want lobster to be a victim, like cod, of management based on an apparent abundance.” He described how the exploratory licences had led to an increase of 113% in fishing effort in LFA 19 as a whole and of 37.5% for commercial

85 Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

86 Guy Vigneault, Director, Shipek Fisheries, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

87 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

88 O'neil Cloutier, Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

89 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

90 Daniel Malec, Director, Economic Development, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

subareas 19A2 and 19C2.⁹¹ While he mentioned the importance of caution in increasing the number of licences, Guy Vigneault did not expect the 25 exploratory licences, in addition to the eight existing commercial licences, to have a negative impact on the lobster on the Côte-Nord in LFA 18 and believed there was “still room to secure more licences.”⁹²

Despite thinking there had not been particularly strong data to initially distribute the exploratory licences, Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, fisherman appearing as an individual, hoped data collected through the exploratory licences could be used to gain a clearer picture of the situation.⁹³ Maryse Lemire confirmed that DFO must “analyze the results [from gathered data] annually to determine whether to continue the exploratory phase the following year or adjust the plan.”⁹⁴

Selection Criteria

Witnesses had mixed reactions to the selection criteria used to attribute exploratory licences, with those who had received an exploratory licence being more supportive of the eligibility criteria and the criteria’s application than those who had not received one. Witnesses discussed the criteria used to determine fleets in difficulty, adjacency and the distribution of exploratory permits between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers.

Jean-René Boucher, General Manager of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du Nord de la Gaspésie, explained the following to the Committee:

Under the circumstances, it was virtually impossible to make a perfect decision. Taking into account all the factors that had to be analyzed, the realities of the various fleets, the fishers in difficulty and everything else, the decision made was appropriate. It could have been better in some respects, as I mentioned, but overall, adequate work was done on that front.⁹⁵

91 O’neil Cloutier, Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

92 Guy Vigneault, Director, Shipék Fisheries, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

93 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

94 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

95 Jean-René Boucher, General Manager, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du Nord de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.



Guy Vigneault described the work his organization did with DFO before receiving exploratory licences for LFA 18 as follows:

We did some extensive work with scientists and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to make things fair and equitable for everyone. We are satisfied with the processes implemented on the Côte-Nord. We have fishing licences adjacent to our areas. We are working collaboratively, and we continue to develop our region.⁹⁶

Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay told the Committee that, although the new abundance of lobster in LFA 19 is “a beautiful gift,”

The allocation plan introduced in 2025 is a plan that divides the various fleets, sometimes creates division within the same fleet, creates division in villages, creates division in the wharves and divides the fishers. This is a missed opportunity, in my opinion, to propose a better future for all.⁹⁷

Camille Gagné gave the following description:

The allocation of lobster licences in 2025 helped people in need. However, it also made millionaires even richer and gave retirees the opportunity to return to fishing. It left young people like me floundering, struggling to get by and racking up debt. We have nothing left to fish for and may go bankrupt. Above all, we have lost confidence in the department's management.⁹⁸

Camille Gagné called the eligibility criteria “open to interpretation and debatable.”⁹⁹ Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay noted many “inconsistencies and irregularities in the mechanisms and criteria that were used in awarding exploratory lobster fishing licences in the Lower St. Lawrence region in 2025.”¹⁰⁰ Kelly Tremblay, fisherwoman appearing as an individual, questioned the “rush in granting exploratory permits without even issuing experimental permits,” believing that the decision gave “the impression that the process was improvised and conducted on an urgent basis, without any real consultation.”¹⁰¹

Camille Gagné highlighted that although a certain fleet might be struggling, individual fishers within that fleet might not be in difficulty themselves. She proposed that information available to DFO, such as the length of time since a fisher purchased a

96 Guy Vigneault, Director, Shipék Fisheries, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

97 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

98 Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

99 Ibid.

100 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

101 Kelly Tremblay, Fisherwoman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

licence or registered a vessel, could have been used to identify individual fishers with the highest debt and likely to be in the most difficulty. She also suggested that fishers with access to other licences and the ability to earn an income may not have been in as serious a situation as those with no other options. In her view, DFO did not do the work with available additional data to “help people in difficulty in a fairer and more equitable manner.”¹⁰²

Recommendation 6

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada, while continuing to prioritize fleets in difficulty when granting exploratory licences, also consider the situation of individual fishers within a fleet in difficulty by considering factors such as the debt linked to the recent purchase of a licence or registration of a fishing vessel or their access to another profitable stock through another fishing licence.

Witnesses wondered about the application of adjacency considerations in the distribution of exploratory licences. Maryse Lemire described the factors considered by DFO when determining adjacency as including “place of residence, historical fishing areas or landing ports.”¹⁰³

The Committee heard from witnesses that believed fishers from too far away had been allowed to fish close to the witnesses’ home port and, conversely, from witnesses that believed the zones had been too restrictive and not representative of their usual fishing grounds.¹⁰⁴ Camille Gagné described the frustrations of not having been deemed eligible for an exploratory licence in LFA 17 because her fishing zone “isn't considered administratively connected, even though it's geographically connected.”¹⁰⁵ O’neil Cloutier supported a residence qualification requirement since it was “specifically designed to protect the regions, ensure their economic growth and allow them access to inshore fisheries in their home region” but told the Committee that “[u]nfortunately, the department has played with that requirement by applying it to some fleets but not to others.”¹⁰⁶ Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay highlighted that “access criteria must be used fairly

102 Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

103 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

104 Ghislain Collin, President, Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025; and Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

105 Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025.

106 O'neil Cloutier, Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.



and consistently in an open, transparent and accountable decision-making process that ensures fair treatment for all” and that “the fishery is a common public resource that should be managed without creating or exacerbating excessive disparities between individuals or regions.”¹⁰⁷

Recommendation 7

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada prioritize adjacency in fishery allocations to benefit local coastal communities, with the goal that resident fishers are prioritized in the granting of fishing rights in the sub-zones where they live.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada make the completion and publication of a socio-economic study mandatory prior to any decision resulting in the allocation or reallocation of new access to a resource. This study must examine different allocation scenarios, including their impacts on regional economic benefits, employment in harvesting and processing, and the vitality of coastal communities that depend on these fisheries, to prevent an inequitable redistribution of benefits to the detriment of independent fishers and coastal regions.

Kelly Tremblay described the frustrations of Category A snow crab licence holders since – after having seen their quotas reduced by 10% to 20% by DFO to create Category B licences more than 20 years ago - Category B licence holders are eligible for exploratory lobster licences in LFA 18 while Category A holders are not.¹⁰⁸

Ghislain Collin, director of the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie (RPPPSG), explained the difficult situation faced by members of his organization after learning that they would not be eligible for exploratory lobster licences in LFA 19. Members had been hopeful that they would qualify as a fleet in difficulty since they had fished for mackerel and herring on the north side of the Gaspé Peninsula before the closure of the mackerel fishery in 2022. However, Ghislain Collin explained that DFO’s criterion on adjacency divided the Gaspé Peninsula in two and the members of the RPPPSG, who are from the southern side of the peninsula, were not eligible for the draw for exploratory lobster licences even though they “often fish and work” on the northern side of the peninsula.¹⁰⁹ Members of the RPPPSG accepted the

107 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

108 Kelly Tremblay, Fishwoman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

109 Ghislain Collin, President, Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

exclusion of those who had sold a shellfish licence since 2014 from the selection criteria, even though some sellers had done so because of low quotas or a lack of profitability, but had hoped that the 11 remaining members could have obtained an exploratory licence. Mr. Collin further stated that members would have accepted the results of the random draw but were denied a chance to participate.¹¹⁰

Recommendation 9

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada issue a letter apologizing to pelagic fish harvesters in Lobster Fishing Areas 19 and 17 for leaving them out of the exploratory lobster licences and that those struggling fish harvesters be included in further decisions.

Recommendation 10

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada make licence and quota decisions based on science and socio-economic impact, not politics.

Exploratory Licences in Lobster Fishing Zones with Existing Commercial Lobster Fishing

The exploratory licences were attributed in LFAs where some commercial fishing already takes place. In LFA 17, which covers approximately 500 km of coastline and where there are 16 active commercial licences, 18 exploratory licences authorizing 4,500 traps, split equally between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers were attributed in 2025. In LFA 18, which covers approximately 700 km of coastline and where there are eight active commercial licences, 12 exploratory licences and 13 communal exploratory licences for First Nations were attributed in 2024. In LFA 19, which covers approximately 450 km of coastline and where there are eight active commercial licences, 52 exploratory licences authorizing 3,500 traps for non-Indigenous fishers and 4,250 traps for Indigenous fishers were attributed in 2025.¹¹¹ Since one of the priority groups for licence attribution was First Nations, the percentage of traps or licences attributed to First Nations in an LFA may be higher than the percentage of the population made up of First Nations in that LFA.¹¹²

110 Ibid.

111 Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

112 Ibid.



Daniel Malec provided context to the Committee about LFA 18, explaining that the “Côte-Nord context is different from the Gaspésie or the Maritimes context. Indeed, fishing activity on the Côte-Nord is fairly limited, and this was a major boost for us. We agreed on a fifty-fifty allocation [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers] to achieve economic reconciliation.”¹¹³ Guy Vigneault added that the equal allocation had been put forward by Indigenous people and industry groups, including existing lobster fishery groups, and applied by DFO.¹¹⁴

O’neil Cloutier told the Committee that

the [M]inister issued exploratory fishing licences in a commercial fishing area where the resource was known to exist. Ultimately, what this did was to create competition between exploratory fishers and commercial fishers in a location where licences are very expensive. It’s unfair competition when some fishers buy their licence while others get it for free, even though all of them are operating in the same environment. This creates a really bizarre situation that’s not good for the fishers or anyone interested in buying a licence, since there is no way of knowing what direction the department will take when it issues future licences. Will it grant exploratory fishing licences in other areas and destroy the market, in other words, undermine the practice among fishers of selling licences to each other, with one coming in while the other goes out?¹¹⁵

Claire Canet, Project Manager for the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, told the Committee that:

DFO has not assessed the economic risks to lobster fishers posed by this new exploratory effort, which is in fact similar to a commercial fishery. The value of a fishing business is based on the health of the stock in its sub-area, the potential catch per licence, the number of participants and the landed value, which depends on the volumes landed and the market’s ability to absorb them. In 2025, there was a lack of processing capacity. Thousands of lobsters caught under an exploratory licence could not be processed and sold. The resource is being wasted.¹¹⁶

Ian MacPherson cautioned about the potential impacts of increased access and quantities of harvested lobster in LFAs 17, 18, and 19 on lobster fishers in other LFAs in the Gulf. He

113 Daniel Malec, Director, Economic Development, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

114 Guy Vigneault, Director, Shipek Fisheries, Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025.

115 O’neil Cloutier, Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

116 Claire Canet, Project Manager, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

also questioned whether the development of new exploratory licences followed the usual principle of one licence in, one licence out.¹¹⁷

Kelly Tremblay highlighted that although exploratory licences holders are generally granted commercial licences, exploratory licences are issued for one-year periods and are not renewable so changes to approaches are possible.¹¹⁸ Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay also mentioned the possibility of reducing the number of traps per exploratory licence to allow more fishers to access a common resource in a more equitable way.¹¹⁹

Consultation

Many witnesses expressed frustration over what they perceived as a lack of consultation: “Without consultations, however, it's hard to bring home the point that fishers who already live in the area should come first or receive priority. Without enough consultation, things happen too quickly, and later on, when we demand explanations, we get no response either.”¹²⁰ Witnesses, including Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay and Ghislain Collin, described either a lack of response or timely responses after having communicated with the department or the Minister.¹²¹ Ian MacPherson told the Committee that

we needed to understand what DFO's plans were and how it was going about it. We need sufficient time, so that associations can have real input into it, not just be advised at the last minute. As associations and members, we've got some really good ideas we can bring to the table on how a launch could go smoothly or badly.¹²²

Kelly Tremblay proposed that if “we really want to build a sustainable and equitable fishery, we must ensure that it is done in consultation with all stakeholders, not just in DFO's offices with the stakeholders it considers relevant.”¹²³

117 Ian MacPherson, Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

118 Kelly Tremblay, Fisherwoman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

119 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

120 Ibid.

121 Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025; and Ghislain Collin, President, Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

122 Ian MacPherson, Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.

123 Kelly Tremblay, Fisherwoman, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 7 October 2025.



Recommendation 11

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in determining exploratory licence attributions, consult all affected fish harvesters.

CONCLUSION

The reopening of the Unit 1 redfish fishery and the attribution of exploratory lobster fishing licences in LFAs, 17, 18 and 19 represents a welcomed opportunity to increase revenues for some fishers, some of whom had been negatively affected by changes to fishing in other stocks. Other witnesses shared their disappointment and the hardships related to these fisheries. However, these opportunities, even when they do meet expectations, have limits. As Todd Williams explained, it “wouldn't work mathematically if we were to say yes to everything.”¹²⁴ DFO must balance the various considerations before making a fisheries management decision.

Any reopening or new access must be managed sustainably to ensure the long-term health of the resource. It should also be managed transparently to maintain public trust and in a way that generates the most returns for the coastal communities that rely on fisheries. Adjacency must be a key criterion in these decisions. The conditions in the Gulf and Estuary of St. Lawrence are evolving because of climate change and will continue to do so. DFO must be able to manage these changes in stock health and the impacts on the fishers who depend on them in a transparent, timely and fair manner. The Committee hopes that this report will support responsible management that allows coastal communities in Atlantic Canada to thrive.

124 Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations, DFO, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Fisheries and Oceans</p> <p>Maryse Lemire, Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Regional Director, Quebec Region</p> <p>Jean-Yves Savaria, Regional Director of Science, Quebec Region</p> <p>Todd Williams, Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management Operations</p>	2025/09/25	4
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Emmanuel Sandt-Duguay, Fisherman</p> <p>Kelly Tremblay, Fisherwoman</p>	2025/10/07	5
<p>Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association</p> <p>Ian MacPherson, Executive Director</p>	2025/10/07	5
<p>Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie</p> <p>Ghislain Collin, President</p>	2025/10/07	5
<p>Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie</p> <p>Claire Canet, Project Manager</p> <p>O'neil Cloutier, Director</p>	2025/10/07	5
<p>Scotia Harvest Inc.</p> <p>Alain d'Entremont, President</p>	2025/10/07	5
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Camille Gagné, Captain-Owner-Operator</p> <p>Guy Gallant, Fish Harvester</p>	2025/10/21	7

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie Claudio Bernatchez, Director General	2025/10/21	7
Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels Jean Lanteigne, General Director	2025/10/21	7
Ocean Choice International Carey Bonnell, Vice-President, Sustainability and Engagement	2025/10/21	7
Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du Nord de la Gaspésie Jean-René Boucher, General Manager	2025/10/21	7
Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht Daniel Malec, Director, Economic Development Guy Vigneault, Director, Shipek Fisheries	2025/10/30	10

APPENDIX B: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

44th Parliament—1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Fisheries and Oceans</p> <p>Adam Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector</p> <p>Sylvain Vézina, Regional Director General, Quebec Region</p> <p>Bernard Vigneault, Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate</p> <p>Doug Wentzell, Regional Director General, Gulf Region</p> <p>Todd Williams, Acting Director General, Fisheries Resource Management</p>	2024/02/27	100
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Dominique Robert, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Fisheries Ecology, Institut des sciences de la mer, Université du Québec à Rimouski</p>	2024/02/29	101
<p>Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie</p> <p>Claudio Bernatchez, Director General</p>	2024/02/29	101
<p>Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels</p> <p>Jean Lanteigne, General Director</p>	2024/02/29	101
<p>Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union</p> <p>Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer</p>	2024/02/29	101
<p>Quebec Office of Shrimp Fishermen</p> <p>Patrice Element, General Manager</p>	2024/02/29	101

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Atlantic Groundfish Council Sylvie Lapointe, President	2024/05/23	111

APPENDIX C: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Agence Mamu Innu Kakussesht

Maritime Fishermen's Union

Vericatch

APPENDIX D: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

44th Parliament—1st Session

Atlantic Groundfish Council

Gulf Shrimp Coalition

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 4, 5, 7, 10, 19, 23 and 26](#)) from the 45th Parliament, 1st Session and ([Meetings Nos. 100, 101, 111 and 122](#)) from the 44th Parliament, 1st Session is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Weiler
Chair

Evidence received by the committee during this study detailed how the allocation of licenses for both Unit 1 redfish and exploratory lobster in LFAs 17, 18, and 19 was utterly mishandled by the Liberal Government. This mishandling has caused distrust, uncertainty, and lost opportunities for Canadians and remote coastal communities. The government's allocation decisions betrayed their earlier promises of access and adjacency, leaving harvesters feeling that they had been misled.

Witnesses told the committee that former Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard, Dominic LeBlanc, promised access to redfish for shrimp harvesters in 2018 to compensate for their reductions in quotas.¹ Many shrimp harvesters believe that this promise has not been fulfilled as the allocations do not reflect the current state of the Gulf of St. Lawrence where Redfish populations have increased to a level at which redfish are over predating on shrimp—with these concerns being raised back in 2016.²

Further, then Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard, Diane Lebouthillier, proceeded to apply historical allocations formulas despite shrimp harvesters being disproportionately affected. The Director General of the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels testified that "at the same time, the former minister Lebouthillier announced a reduction of nearly 80% in shrimp quotas in the same zones. Shrimpers in New Brunswick, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador would receive only 10% of the allocated redfish quotas."³

Multiple witnesses emphasized the importance of applying the principle of adjacency within the fishery to sustain and grow rural coastal communities.⁴ Despite this principle being important for fisheries management and allocation, the Liberal Minister of Fisheries failed to completely apply the adjacency principle when allocating new exploratory lobster licenses. This unfair allocation has directly undermined the economic viability of fishing enterprises in LFAs 17, 18, and 19.

Finally, the Liberal Government has failed to develop a commercially viable redfish market or even allocate licenses that would be commercially viable. As Jean Lanteigne testified that, "allocating the entire coastal-based fleet less than 25% of Unit 1 redfish is a far cry from the at least 50% needed to ensure financial solvency and economic sustainability for the

¹ Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025

² Claudio Bernatchez, Director General, Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024

³ Jean Lanteigne, Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, [Evidence](#), 21 October 2025

⁴ Guy Vigneault, Director, Shippek Fisheries, Agence Mamu In- nu Kakussesht, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2025

region.”⁵ Shrimp harvesters willing to convert to the redfish fishery only received 10% of the allocation.⁶ By failing to factor any form of socio-economic analysis into the allocation decision, Liberal fisheries ministers have continuously made decisions that harm Canadian harvesters and cause unnecessary irritants between industry and government. Evidence provided during this study repeatedly illustrated how the Liberal government failed to deliver timely decisions informed by proper socio-economic impact analyses and meaningful and expansive consultations for the benefit of Canadian harvesters.

⁵ Jason Spingle, Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, *Evidence*, 29 February 2024

⁶ DFO, “2024-2025 - Unit 1 Redfish Management Plan,” webpage, May 31, 2024, <https://www.glf.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/en/node/20257>