

Agenda item 5.1(a)
For Information

Council

CNL(09)40

Management of salmon rivers in Quebec, Canada

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Response to the comments made by the review group in the final report on fisheries management regarding the lack of information provided on the management of Quebec salmon rivers.

The *Act Respecting the Conservation and Development of Wildlife* of the Quebec Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife governs activities relating to salmon resources. The Act requires that the conservation of spawners must first be achieved, after which fishing is allowed, in the following order of priority: fishing for social, ceremonial and food (Aboriginal), sport fishing and finally, commercial fishing. Also, the Act states that registration of all sports catches of salmon is mandatory and must be declared within 48 hours.

Since 2000, the Department has implemented new management rules for Quebec salmon rivers based on the concept of conservation limits. A decision framework sets out the general rules governing the harvest and conservation of Quebec salmon stocks. The rules are presented in the annex. The harvest of Atlantic salmon in Quebec is based on the principles of the precautionary approach adopted by the member countries of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) (CNL (98)46). In the context of harvesting, these principles are aimed at maintaining salmon stocks above established conservation limits. The harvest framework is also part of a long-term strategy aimed at achieving optimal production of Quebec salmon rivers.

To this end, the Quebec Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife has established, for each river, a conservation limit that identifies a minimum number of eggs that must be deposited by spawning salmon. To determine the current status of the salmon stock, the Department estimates the average egg deposition rate over the last three years, in accessible or inaccessible sectors colonized by juvenile salmon and, consistent with prudent management, takes salmon return forecasts into account. When it is anticipated that a river will be unable to exceed its conservation limit, restrictive measures are imposed: harvesting of large salmon is limited (partial opening) or release of large salmon is mandatory, or all sport fishing is prohibited, including catch and release.

Salmon populations occur in 109 rivers and 5 tributaries in Quebec. In 2008, salmon fishing was permitted in 83 of these rivers. Of that number, 26 rivers were open to grilse fishing only, 10 rivers were partially open to the harvest of large salmon and 47 rivers were open to the harvest of large and small salmon. Thirty-one rivers were closed to fishing given the status of the stock.

A detailed report, entitled *Bilan de l'exploitation du saumon au Québec*, is published annually and is available online at <http://www.mrnf.gouv.qc.ca/publications/faune/bilan-saumon-2008.pdf>. It contains data gathered since 1984 on salmon harvest levels, runs and stocking levels for all Quebec rivers. A summary of the data is presented in the form of tables and figures for all of Quebec and for each salmon zone. The harvest statistics for each river, and the achievement of the conservation limit, are grouped together in the annex of the overview.

Annex

Quebec Decision Framework

The following rules form the decision framework governing the harvest of Atlantic salmon stocks in Quebec rivers.

- A. Commercial fishing for salmon is prohibited.
- B. For rivers where the conservation limit is less than 50 spawners, salmon fishing is prohibited.
- C. For all rivers that are below the conservation limit, release of large salmon is mandatory.
- D. For rivers where stocks are declining and are at less than 30% of the level required to reach the conservation limit, fishing for salmon (small and large) is prohibited.
- E. For rivers where grilse contribute over 10% of egg deposition for the achievement of the conservation limit and where stocks are between 30 and 40% of this limit, release of all salmon (small and large) is mandatory.
- F. For salmon rivers where anadromous brook trout is also fished, the maintenance of the brook trout fishery will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with consideration given to the presence and vulnerability of salmon in the targeted sectors.
- G. For rivers where there is little information on salmon runs and the general trend in the area is below the conservation limits, fishing for large salmon is prohibited.
- H. For rivers not on the list of salmon rivers, fishing for salmon (small and large) is permitted and is subject to the applicable provisions of the *Quebec Fishery Regulations, 1990* (federal *Fisheries Act*).
- I. For rivers whose conservation limit is exceeded, fishing for large salmon is permitted until a harvest target previously established by the mandated manager in conjunction with the Department is reached.

During the course of the season, the Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife may intervene to order the mandatory release of salmon or the closure of the fishery if it feels that stock conservation cannot be achieved. Moreover, it is also possible that the practice of fishing be modified under an agreement between the Government of Quebec and a First Nations or between the Minister of Natural Resources and Wildlife and an Aboriginal organization.