

**North American Commission**

**NAC(03)8**

*Review of Atlantic Salmon Management Measures for 2003*

*(tabled by Canada)*

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#### **Introduction**

Atlantic salmon stocks continue to be in poor condition throughout Atlantic Canada. There are still many areas where there are serious concerns for conservation of the stocks. Low returns are generally associated with low marine survival.

Canadian management measures are tailored to the needs of specific rivers and watersheds to meet conservation targets, while striving for an overall Precautionary Approach.

#### **Commercial Fisheries**

There are no commercial fisheries for Atlantic salmon on Canada's east coast. The last commercial fishery, a small fishery on Québec's Lower North Shore, concluded in 1999.

Commercial fisheries moratoria in Labrador and insular Newfoundland remain in place indefinitely.

#### **Aboriginal Food Fisheries**

Aboriginal food fisheries for Atlantic salmon take place throughout Atlantic Canada and Québec. Aboriginal fisheries for food, social and ceremonial purposes are permitted after conservation requirements have been addressed, and take precedence over recreational fishing.

The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) seeks to develop food fishery licences with Aboriginal groups that identify allocations, monitoring system requirements (guardians/logbooks, etc.) and scientific projects such as tagging or gear trials (e.g. the use of trapnets instead of gillnets).

The food fishery for Atlantic salmon for the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) is managed under a communal licence. The Innu Nation Food Fishery is managed under a special management plan for Lake Melville.

For the 2002 season, LIA had an assigned quota of 10mt, and reported landings of 10.1 tonnes (preliminary) compared to 9.6 tonnes in 2001. The Innu Nation had a quota of 1,500 salmon in 2002, with reported landings of 1.3 tonnes (preliminary) compared to 2.4 tonnes in 2001. Both of these Aboriginal food fisheries were strictly monitored by DFO with the assistance of Aboriginal fishery guardians. Management measures included tagging and mandatory log returns, along with reduced seasons and selected closed areas.

A resident food fishery has been implemented in Southern Labrador for the past three years. The fishery is managed under a special management plan, which permits the retention of four salmon as a by-catch in the trout and charr fishery. Recorded landings for 2002 were 5.5 tonnes (preliminary) compared to 4.1 tonnes in 2001. Similar to management measures

imposed on the Aboriginal food fishery, the resident food fishery has reduced seasons to permit early-run (MSW) salmon to escape to the rivers. In addition, tagging and mandatory log returns are part of the management strategy. Guardians employed by the Labrador Métis Nation assist DFO in monitoring and enforcement of the fishery. In 2002, approximately 95% of the logs were returned to DFO, which is exceptional compared to other commercial and Aboriginal fisheries.

## **Recreational Fisheries**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

2002 was the first year of a new multi-year (2002-2006) Atlantic salmon management plan.

The Plan features a River Classification and Adaptive Management Strategy for Insular Newfoundland and areas of Southern Labrador. The Plan permits different retention limits based on the health of individual river stocks. These limits range from retention of six grilse on a Class I river, to catch and release only on a Class IV river. The retention of MSW salmon is only permitted on select rivers in Zones 1 & 2 in Labrador.

Other key management measures include the mandatory use of barbless hooks on all scheduled salmon rivers, closures based on environmental protocols (i.e. low water levels or high water temperatures), as well as selected river closures for the entire season for conservation reasons.

New conservation management measures implemented for the past two years in Southern Labrador for the recreational salmon fishery will continue in 2003. These measures include the introduction of a river classification system for selected rivers. All rivers impacted by the construction of the Trans Labrador Highway have a Class III designation (2 grilse seasonal limit). No retention of large fish (i.e. greater than 63cm) is permitted on these rivers. For all other salmon rivers in Zones 1 & 2, the seasonal bag limit of three grilse and one large salmon will apply.

Recreational catches in Newfoundland and Labrador totaled 42,401 salmon in 2001 compared to 44,190 in 2002.

## **Maritimes Region**

The Maritimes Region consists of five Salmon Fishing Areas (19, 20, 21, 22 and 23). In 2002, there were no salmon rivers in the Region that achieved spawning requirements. Rivers in two of these Areas (20 and 21) are negatively impacted by acid rain and are generally of low productivity. Given the stock status and the forecast for similar returns in 2003, management options are limited. Complete closures will be applied to most rivers in the Region with some limited hook and release angling opportunities and Aboriginal harvests limited essentially to hatchery-origin fish. Angling licence sales have declined in Nova Scotia by 74% within the past decade.

Area 19 will open for hook and release only. In Areas 20 and 21, a pilot river categorization scheme introduced in 2001 will continue in 2003. Five rivers with hatchery supplementation will be open to hook and release, and food fisheries on those same five rivers will be

permitted for fin-clipped hatchery grilse. This limited access in Areas 20 and 21 is not expected to contribute to any a further decline in the stocks.

Rivers in the Inner Bay of Fundy portion of Areas 22 and 23 remain closed to salmon fishing (since 1990) and salmon stocks in this area were listed as “endangered” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in 2001. A live-gene bank program for Inner Bay of Fundy salmon stocks was initiated in 1998 and a recovery plan for these stocks has been prepared. Canada’s *Species At Risk Act* is expected to be promulgated in June 2003, which will trigger strict measures to protect these endangered stocks.

## **Gulf Region**

The Gulf Region consists of four Salmon Fishing Areas (15, 16, 17 and 18). Salmon return patterns in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence rivers range from declining through stable. Large salmon returns were lower than in 2001 in all assessed rivers of the Maritime Provinces. Small salmon returns generally increased in 2002. Returns in most rivers in Gulf Region were close to or at their minimum conservation requirement. In 2002, there were no closures due to warm weather or low water conditions. Atlantic salmon were harvested by two user groups in 2002: Aboriginal peoples and recreational fishers.

The **Restigouche River** (SFA 15) appears to have fallen short of the conservation requirement in 2002. Large salmon abundance was lower than in 2001, whereas small salmon abundance was much greater. Returns in 2003 should be similar to the last five years, approximately at the minimum conservation requirement.

The **Miramichi River** (SFA 16) system overall and the Southwest Miramichi did not meet the conservation requirements in 2002, the fourth time in five years. The Northwest Miramichi did not meet the conservation requirements in 2002, the fifth consecutive year. Small salmon returns in 2002 were up 30% from the previous five-year average. The outlook for 2003 is for a return of large salmon greater than 2002 in both the Northwest and Southwest Miramichi rivers. The southern portion of SFA 16 will remain closed for 2003.

Because the majority of salmon returning to the Morell and other PEI rivers (SFA 17) in 2002 are of hatchery origin, current fisheries have little impact on future runs and status quo will apply.

Angling catches in the rivers of Northumberland Strait area of Nova Scotia (SFA 18) remained low in 2002. Juvenile densities were equal to or greater than reference levels in four of eight rivers surveyed. Escapement to the Margaree River was just above the conservation requirement. The juvenile densities in the Margaree River remained high.

In 2002, allocations for Aboriginal bands on the Miramichi River were 13,117 grilse and 1,444 salmon. Preliminary estimates of removals were 2,587 grilse and 221 salmon. Allocations for 2003 are still under negotiation.

2003 management measures for SFA 15, 16, 17 and 18 are unchanged from 2002.

## **Province of Québec**

Stocks continue to decline, especially on the Upper and Mid North Shore. River survival is being maintained, but at-sea survival is declining. For 2003, a small increase in large salmon is expected.

Québec has developed a multi-year salmon plan which establishes conservation limits and management targets for each river. Where the conservation limit is not met, catch and release fishing only is permitted for large salmon and to some extent for grilse, if the latter contribute more than 10% to the egg deposition, to reach to conservation limit for each river. The fishing of MSW salmon is permitted, with restrictions, on rivers where the conservation limit is exceeded.

Since 1984, the reporting of catches is mandatory in Quebec. In 2003, an on-line catch reporting system has been implemented to provide timely information on catches (date, length, weight, location). This information will enable managers to react more quickly with better management decisions.