

News Release

NR-QR-03-03E

April 25, 2003

2003 SNOW CRAB MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR CRAB FISHING AREAS 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17

Quebec City – The Honourable Robert G Thibault, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, today announced the 2003 Snow Crab Management Plans for crab fishing areas (CFAs) 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

Studies show an overall decline in the abundance and size of snow crab throughout the region.

Snow crab stocks are variable, and subject to natural fluctuation. Increases and decreases in abundance are considered normal and are unrelated to other fisheries in Atlantic Canada. Recent assessments in the region show that crab biomass in the region has reduced due to poor recruitment and early maturation. This has led to a decline in the number of mature females and commercial sized male crab.

As a result, reductions are being made in the total allowable catch for all of these fishing areas for the 2003 season.

“Wise and prudent management of these stocks is required now, in order to protect and conserve this valuable resource,” said Minister Thibault.

Outlined below are the total allowable catches (TACs) set for CFAs 13 – 17 for the 2003 snow crab fishing season:

Area 13 (Lower North Shore of Quebec and off Newfoundland and Labrador)

Area 13 includes 49 fishers, including six whose home port is in Newfoundland. The condition of snow crab stocks in this area is critical and a continuation of the current fishing effort could jeopardize species spawning. No commercial fishing will be allowed in the Area in 2003. A quota of 50 tonnes is being allocated for scientific research purposes.

Area 14 (Lower North Shore of Quebec)

Area 14 includes 21 crab fishers. The fishing season will begin on May 5, 2003 and end on August 9, 2003. The TAC has been set at 351 tonnes, down 42 per cent from 2002.

This substantial decrease is necessary because of concerns over declining crab resources in this area. Immediate action is required to ensure some stability of the stock. Of the TAC, 10 tonnes will be reserved for scientific research purposes. There will be no temporary sharing.

Area 15 (Lower North Shore)

Area 15 includes eight crab fishers. The fishing season began on April 14, 2003 under an interim management plan and will end on August 2, 2003. The TAC has been set at 326 tonnes. It has been reduced by 18 per cent from 2002 in order to halt the decrease in biomass and protect potential spawning stock. A quota of 10 tonnes will be reserved for scientific research purposes.

Area 16 (Middle North Shore)

Area 16 includes 39 crab fishers, including three First Nations. The fishing season began on April 14, 2003 under an interim management plan and will end on August 2, 2003. The TAC has been set at 2,167 tonnes, a 57 per cent decrease from 2002. The TAC was significantly reduced to slow the current decrease in biomass, stabilize average crab size and protect spawning stock. There will be no temporary sharing. In addition, Area 16A, created in 2002, will be maintained to eventually help Lower North Shore fleets, when the state of the biomass allows it.

Area 17 (St. Lawrence Estuary)

Area 17 includes 23 crab fishers, including, after a third licence was issued this year, three First Nations. The fishing season began on April 1, 2003 under an interim management plan and will end on July 30, 2003. The TAC has been set at 2,567 tonnes, a 15 per cent decrease, compared with 2002. There will be temporary sharing of 15.2% (390 tonnes) of the allocation. Discussions on a new co-management approach for this zone are not yet complete.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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