

Gulf of St Lawrence Northern Shrimp and Gulf of St Lawrence Northern Shrimp Trawl Esquiman Channel



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SPECIES Northern shrimp
(*Pandalus borealis*)

FISHING METHOD Otter trawl

COUNTRY Canada

LOCATION



The Gulf of St Lawrence, off eastern Canada

FISHERY TONNAGE 28,800 tonnes;
8,867 tonnes

The Gulf of St Lawrence northern shrimp trawl Esquiman Channel fishery is the result of a harmonization process to coordinate activities in an area of certification assessment overlap.

IN APRIL, JUST six months after this fishery was certified, marine scientists were plying the waters of the Gulf of St Lawrence, collecting mud samples as part of a study into possible impacts on the seabed from shrimp trawling. Co-funded by local government and the seven client companies that are eligible to use the MSC logo, it will first assess the abundance and diversity of organisms living in the bottom sediment, then look at how they may be affected by trawls.

Researching possible environmental impacts

"If we weren't MSC certified, we would not at this time be hiring a firm to do the research and find out if we are affecting the fishing grounds or not," says Jules Pepin, vice-president of marketing at Les Pêcheries Marinard Ltd, one of the client organisations. The initiative came as a direct result of one of the conditions set in order to meet the MSC standard, even though the fishery scored highly. It was already extremely well managed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the government department responsible. Fishing is limited by permits, allocated to 100 or so small boats; the TAC (Total Allowable Catch) for each area is reviewed every year, taking into account stock status; a mesh size of 40mm or more is enforced (to allow under size shrimp to escape); and use of a separator device, called a Nordmore grid, is mandatory on trawls to exclude any bycatch of non-target species. The existing management plan also requires that endangered species, such as northern and spotted wolffish, must be returned to the water.

"Our methods of fishing are right," Pepin says, "but this research will protect the grounds further". Researchers from ISMER (the Institute of Marine Sciences at the University of Quebec, in Rimouski) will initially work with DFO scientists and, by 2011, DFO Quebec will convene a workshop to report the findings. "At the moment, we are not in a position to prove that we are not affecting the fishing grounds," says

Pepin. "If we are, we will take the necessary measures to correct that. We may have to make a few changes to avoid these softer, sedimented areas of seabed."

Serge Haché, director of supply at L'Association Cooperative des Pêcheurs de L'Île Ltd, another client organisation, suspects there will be few changes to make. "Using Scanmar sensors and cameras mounted on trawls, we have already demonstrated scientifically that damage to the seabed is minimal," he says. "What we have to provide is more specific data over the next two years."

Access to new markets

Meeting the condition will pay dividends commercially, as the fishery cannot afford to lose its certification. "We get calls from new clients, saying they want the little blue label on shipments," Haché says. "The certification has definitely helped us to make some new sales. Two months after we were certified, a buyer said he wanted only MSC shrimp, with the label on the box and everything. If we hadn't been able to provide it, he would have gone elsewhere."

Eighty-five per cent of shrimp from the fishery is sold to Europe, where many supermarkets will only take MSC certified product. "In 2006, Walmart – the biggest retailer in the world – led the way with its powerful commitment to MSC," Haché says. "It is like a snowball starting to roll. We want to be a part of it now, before it is imposed."

In a market where wild-caught shrimp is under pressure from the farmed variety, cheaply produced in Asia, the MSC logo also helps. "I think it was a very important decision to promote the natural, coldwater shrimp by taking it down this route," Haché says. "It is one more good thing to put on the label: that it comes from a fishery proven to be sustainable and well managed."

“Nordic Seafood was delighted to see the Gulf of St Lawrence northern shrimp fishery become MSC certified. In recent years we have been faced with increasing demand for sustainable seafood by customers. We feel that MSC certification was a great step that will ensure a bright future and strong demand for the northern shrimp”

Lars Olsen, Sales Director for Nordic Seafood A/S



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