

Canada Northern Prawn /  
Gulf of St Lawrence  
Northern Shrimp Trawl  
Esquiman Channel



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DATE CERTIFIED 5 August 2008;  
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SPECIES Northern prawn/shrimp  
(*Pandalus borealis*)

FISHING METHOD Otter trawl

COUNTRY Canada

LOCATION



The Atlantic Ocean,  
Atlantic Canadian  
waters, northern Gulf of  
St Lawrence and St.  
Lawrence River estuary

FISHERY TONNAGE 68,000 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 1992, WHEN the cod trawlers began returning from the Grand Banks with nothing but ice in their holds, it was hard to see a silver lining. The cod had been fished to commercial extinction, but their depletion triggered a surge in numbers for the northern prawn on which they fed, transforming *Pandalus borealis* into one of Newfoundland's most valuable species.

**Precautionary management**

"Given the size of that biomass, our exploitation rate is conservative," says Derek Butler, Executive Director of the Association of Seafood Producers in St John's, Newfoundland. "Biomass has grown but fishery quotas have not gone up in proportion, which is good. "This is one of the things – not being more aggressive on the stock – that contributed to our successful MSC assessment."

While fishing effort has increased, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) – the government department that manages the fishery – is "careful" to restrict licences, Butler says. "There are still only 300 boats fishing shrimp, compared to 3,000 for crab," he adds. All boats use otter trawls with a mesh size of 40mm or more, fitted with a Nordmore grate. Prawns pass through the grate, while fish are directed upwards to an escape panel – a mandatory requirement. This reduces fish bycatch, the biggest problem in most shrimp fisheries. Bobbins or rubber discs are also fitted to the groundrope so the leading edge of the net 'flies' clear of the bottom. Any flatfish disturbed by it can therefore pass below the net's entrance. If bycatch in a trawl exceeds five per cent, vessels must move at least five miles before they resume fishing.

Measures like these made the fishery well-managed, but a few conditions had to be met as a requirement of certification. "One was that our management plan should dictate what would happen if biomass declined, because shellfish fisheries are cyclical," says Butler. "If it did, how would we reduce the number of vessels fishing?"

While the DFO had a broad policy goal, "It had to be clarified and made explicit, to prove that measures were in place to reduce fishing effort as the biomass declined" – a clarification that Butler welcomes.

"That is something we did not have with cod," he laments. "Imagine if we'd had the MSC during the cod days. All of a sudden, they would have seen the catches declining in certain areas and said, 'What is your management response to that?' It would have been written into their action plan. All things being equal, we might not have lost the cod fishery if the MSC had existed."

**Retaining existing and expanding into new markets**

However, the reason for seeking certification was commercial, not just environmental. More than half the fishery's harvest has always gone to Britain (the figure is more like 80 per cent now) where, in 2004, shrimp producers spotted a trend. "In the UK, the big retailers were saying, 'We want only MSC-certified product on our shelves' – and the deadline was soon. Our shrimp producers said, 'We'd better get the label before somebody stops carrying our product'."

As well as retaining markets, his members have grown them as a result of MSC certification. "We've had increased expression of interest, since getting the label, from markets that didn't carry our product before," Butler confirms.

More poetically, the label represents closure of a chapter in history – and a commitment not to see it repeated. "The MSC was created by WWF and Unilever on the back of the Grand Banks groundfish collapse," says Butler. "In Newfoundland and Labrador, we have certified a fishery to say to the world, 'Our track record is unfortunate, but we are doing better. Our fishery is now good – and here is the stamp of approval that says so to the consumer.' By getting ourselves certified, we have come full circle."



“Clearwater is proud of our efforts in environmental stewardship. Pursuit of MSC designation for our Cooked & Peeled Coldwater Shrimp products from the Canada northern prawn fishery was a natural fit to Clearwater's commitment to sustainability. The commercial value of the certificate is evident from new market access, customer and consumer recognition and demand”

Dennis Coates, Business Development Manager, Clearwater



“The most notable achievement in our fishery in recent years is clearly becoming MSC certified. It will be a proud legacy for those who supported this initiative when they look back on the success this represents”

Derek Butler, Association of Seafood Producers, St John's, Newfoundland