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**KEITH SULLIVAN**  
*President*

**DAVID DECKER**  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

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This northern cod fishery improvement project, led by FFAW-Unifor, has been ongoing since 2015. Over the past three years, there have been considerable improvements both the biology and management of this iconic fishery. The spawning stock biomass (SSB) continues to increase and is currently estimated to be 398,000 t, which is a major improvement from and SSB of 10,000 t 25 years ago.

As the stock grows, we are committed to building a sustainable and high value fishery. Changes include increasing the stewardship fishery season from 4 weeks in 2015, which produced a glut of fish during the summer months, to a 4 month fishery in 2019 (the same is anticipated in 2020), allowing for improvements in both quality and price. Moreover, the longer fishery season benefits active fish harvesters as it relieves pressure to land all their fish in a short period of time and allows better decisions making based on other fisheries, weather, etc. We are building a more sustainable, higher-value – and safer – fishery.

Although there has been considerable progress in the growth of the stock, there remain outstanding items in our Fishery Improvement Project Action Plan related to the Limit Reference Point (LRP). Currently, there are unresolved questions with respect to the LRP. At the 2019 regional peer review process to evaluate the LRP, DFO Science indicated that additional information on the productivity of the stock between roughly 400-800,000 t would help resolve LRP questions as those levels of SSB correspond to the gap in the stock-recruit relationship. Further, DFO Science indicated that further information on stock productivity in this range could be gathered through refinement of the Extended Northern Cod Model (1962-2018).

The current LRP for Northern Cod is at a level that represents the average spawning stock biomass during the 1980s. It is important to note, however, that Northern Cod recovered from lower spawning stock biomass levels during the 1970s despite considerable fishery removals that would be unacceptable today. Thus, the 1970s period represents an empirical basis for establishing the LRP.

FFAW-Unifor has previously requested that further DFO Science refine the longer time-series model. It was requested that DFO bring that information forward at the Northern Cod Assessment planned for March 2020 but this meeting was unable to go ahead due to current COVID-19 restrictions. Even if such data were available in March 2020, we suspect that there would need to be considerable work in addressing the outstanding items related to the LRP in our Action Plan. As such, FFAW-Unifor requests an extension of the end date for the FIP from 2021 to 2025, providing ample time or DFO to complete this crucial work. To date, many of the outstanding action items cannot be completed until this review is complete.

We note that the Association of Seafood Producers/Atlantic Groundfish Council FIP has extended the time period for their Fishery Improvement Project for the same stock until 2025 due to the expected

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**FFAW | UNIFOR**  
Fish, Food & Allied Workers

PO Box 10, Station C  
368 Hamilton Avenue, 2nd Floor  
St. John's NL A1C 5H5

Tel: 709.576.7276  
Fax: 709.576.1962  
Web: [www.ffaw.nf.ca](http://www.ffaw.nf.ca)

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timelines of research that they have included in their FIP. Given that both FIPs are in relation to the same stock, we request a similar extension. During which time we will continue to make advancements on any and all outstanding Performance Indicators. We will continue to improve understanding of the Northern Cod (2J3KL) Stock through:

- our long-term tagging program to better estimate cod movements and migrations and estimate fishing mortality levels;
- our cod sentinel and cod quality programs that provide information on fishing practices, catch rates and catch composition from the inshore fishery;
- and through our commitment to ensure best possible management of this stock through our contributions to the research, assessment and management of this iconic stock.