



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
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Whales / Marine Mammal Issues Update

The Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters
Federation

Moncton, NB

July 25, 2018



Threats to Endangered Whales in Canada

North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW)

- Population estimated at ~450
- 17 mortalities recorded on the Atlantic in 2017, 12 in the Gulf of St. Lawrence
- Key threats include mortality from vessel strikes and entanglement in fishing gear

Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW)

- Southern Resident killer whales are an endangered species, with ~ 76 individuals remaining
- Primary threats include reduced prey availability, physical and acoustic disturbance, and environmental contaminants
- Government of Canada determined an imminent threat to their survival and recovery

St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga (SLEB)

- Environmental contaminants and pollution, possibly connected to chronic diseases observed;
- Acoustic disturbance from marine vessel traffic and whale-watching activities; and
- Reduced availability of prey species.

Increasing market and public pressure to clearly demonstrate action to protect these species:
e.g. US Marine Mammal Protection Act requirements for fisheries by 2022, US Senate letter – 2018 alleging Canada not doing enough on NARW, threat of litigation by Ecojustice on SRKW



Budget 2018 – Whales Initiative

- Budget 2018 includes \$167.4 million over five years to help protect and recover endangered whale species in Canada, notably the SRKW, NARW, and SLEB.
- Targeted at addressing threats from human activities under the mandate of DFO, TC and ECCC, e.g. entanglement, ship strikes, noise disturbance, contaminants
- Includes enhancing support to NGOs involved in response to marine mammal incidents, such as disentangling whales from fishing gear



North Atlantic Right Whale

- A series of targeted measures were implemented in 2017 and 2018 to demonstrate Canada's leadership in protecting the species
- Canada's strategy for NARW in 2018 had impacts on coastal communities in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, in particular fish harvesters and processors.
- These measures are important to the long-term conservation of North Atlantic Right Whales and to address risks to Canada's seafood exports to the U.S.



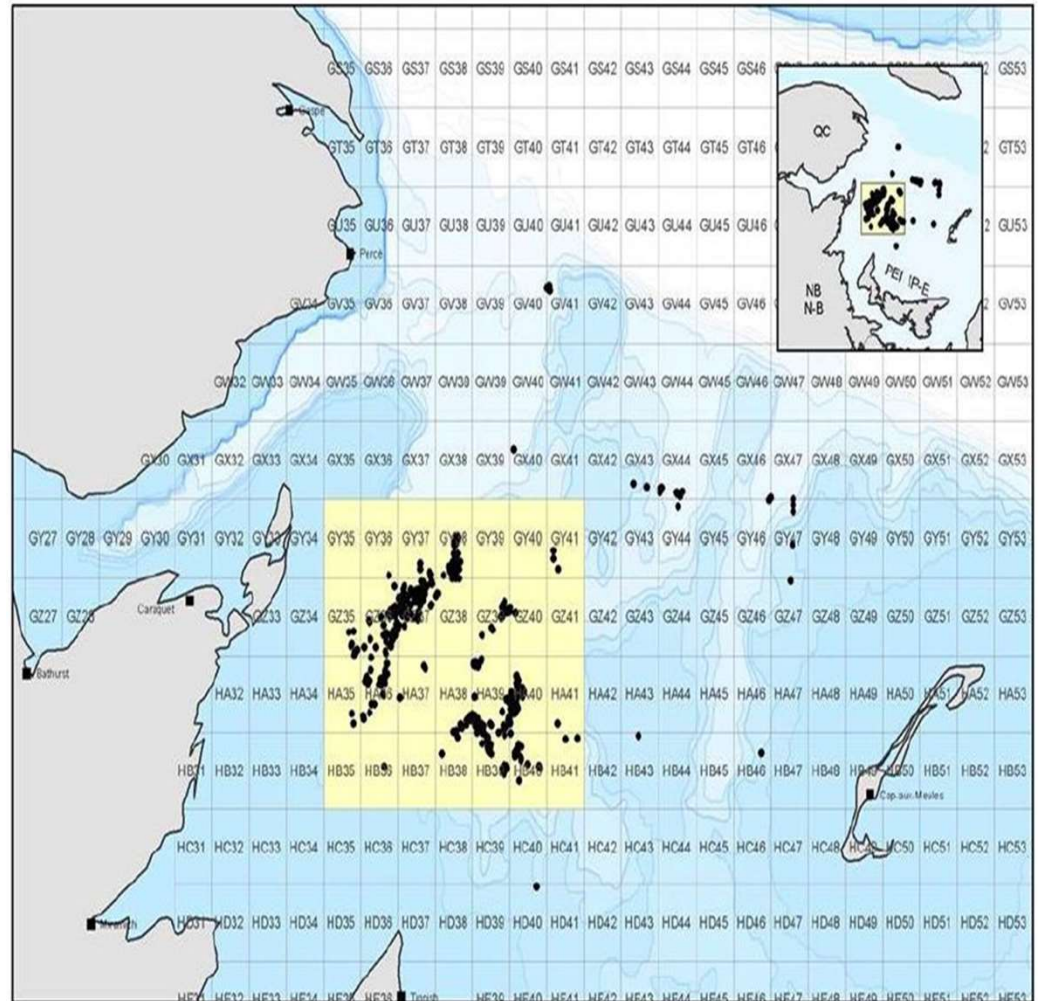
NARW Monitoring on the East Coast

- A range of platforms and tools are used to detect NARW, including:
 - aerial surveillance: on any given day, up to five aircraft can be monitoring the Gulf of St. Lawrence in search for whales.
 - at sea vessel monitoring (e.g. Government and NGO vessels)
 - acoustic gliders
 - reports by fish harvesters and partner organizations, e.g. NGOs and NOAA.
- Daily maps with NARW sightings are produced, and a multi-region NARW Working Group meets daily to review sightings and make recommendations on management measures.
- The majority of the NARW sighted to date are located in the defined static and dynamic management areas in the Gulf.
- No NARW deaths in Canadian waters to date and only one observed NARW entanglement occurred this summer.



STATIC Fisheries Closure

- Effective April 28, 2018
- Applicable to all non-tended fixed gear fisheries
- Defined based on the area where 90% of NARW observations occurred in 2017



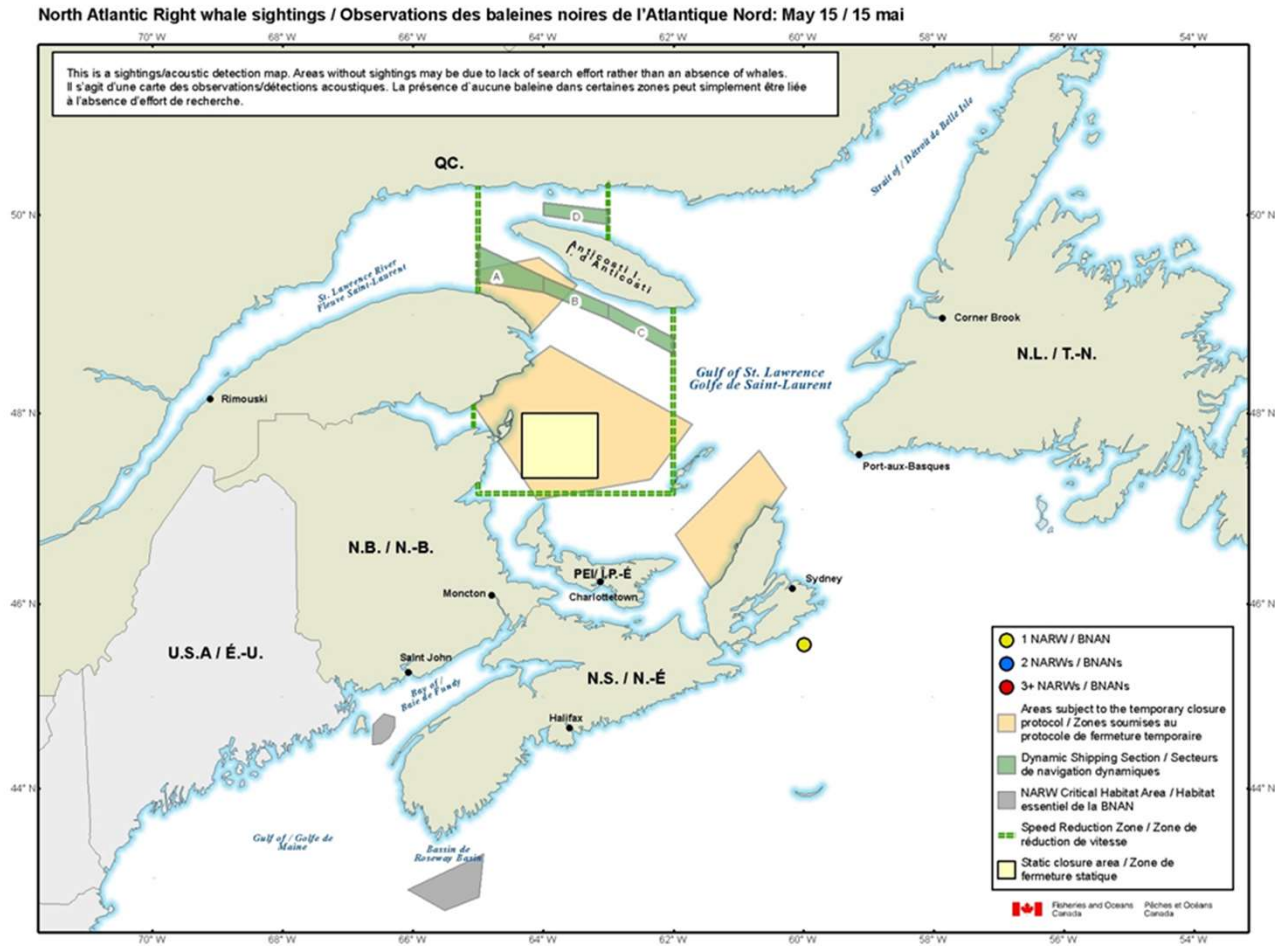


Dynamic Management

- Temporarily closed specific areas to non-tended fixed gear fisheries in order to prevent incidents with NARW, effective April 28, 2018.
- Transport Canada implemented a vessel slow-down area, effective April 28, 2018 through to November 15, 2018.
- When one NARW is seen within these areas, DFO closes a total of nine grids to create a buffer area around the sighting location. Closures in force for a minimum period of 15 days, extended as necessary if there are additional sightings.
- Licence holders have 48 hours to retrieve fishing gear from the area prior to closure (subject to weather conditions).



Dynamic Management



Prepared by Marine Fish and Mammals Section, Fisheries and Ecosystem Science, Fisheries and Oceans Canada | Préparé par Section des poissons et mammifères marins, Sciences halieutiques et écosystémiques, Pêches et Océans Canada
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Gear Innovation

- DFO is exploring new fishing technologies and methods that would maintain an active fishing industry while also reducing the risk of whale entanglements, such as weak links in buoy lines, lower-strength lines, and consideration of different oceanic and climatic conditions
- Our department has hired a research scientist with expertise in gear technology to help investigate gear technologies and in the evaluation of pilot projects
- DFO is supportive of industry-driven testing of new gear technologies.
- These new technologies could aid in the coexistence of whales and fishing in the future.



Preparations for 2019

- Post-season review planned for the Fall to discuss the effectiveness of management measures this year and how to improve them for future use.
- Opportunity for industry and stakeholders to provide feedback and alternative management measures for consideration
- Canada/U.S. NARW meeting scheduled for November to share information and best practices
- Updated Science advice and information pertaining to innovative gear technologies



2018 Measures to Protect the SRKW

- Chinook (primary prey) harvest reduced by 25-35 per cent.
- Closure of three key SRKW foraging areas to commercial and recreational salmon fishing
- Voluntary slowdown and lateral displacement of commercial vessels in foraging habitat
- Mandatory approach distance of 200 metres for killer whales under Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations
- Development of noise management plans for a domestic vessel fleet
- Enhanced surveillance
- Increased underwater listening to detect whales, noise impacts and effectiveness of management measures
- Establishment of a Multi-Stakeholder and Indigenous Peoples Working Group



St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga

- Work underway with Port of Saguenay Authority on possible mitigation measures to reduce threats
- Plans for additional Marine Protected Areas in the Estuary and Gulf of St-Lawrence.
- MMR approach distance for St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga now aligned with measures in the Saguenay St. Lawrence Marine Park (400m)

D5

need to simplify bullets

DFO-MPO, 2018-06-21



Marine Mammal Response Program

Although our focus is on prevention, DFO has committed \$1 million in support of marine mammal response operations on an annual basis

In collaboration with conservation groups and non-governmental organizations, DFO supports marine mammal incident response networks in all regions under the umbrella of the Marine Mammal Response Program (MMRP)

- Partnerships in place with third party responders who provide network coordination and response for 2018
- Capacity building with other response organizations and Indigenous communities are in progress



Marine Mammal Regulations

- The Government has amended the *Marine Mammal Regulations* to provide greater protection for marine mammals including Canada's at-risk whales.
- Amendments include:
 - Regulating marine mammal watching
 - Prohibiting swimming with marine mammals
 - Defining “disturb” in the Regulations
 - General 100-metre minimum approach distance for whales, dolphins and porpoises (does not apply to vessels in transit) and modified minimum approach distances for some species (e.g. 200 meters for killer whales, including SRKW, and 400 meters for SLEB in the St. Lawrence Estuary)
 - Require the reporting of any interactions with marine mammals
- Generally speaking, it is the approach distance and mandatory reporting to DFO that potentially apply to commercial harvesters