Gulf Nova Scotia Fleet Planning Board

Scientific Fishery for Atlantic Halibut

2021

Final Report
12-9-2021

Introduction

The Gulf Nova Scotia Fleet Planning Board (GNSFPB) was asked to collaborate on a scientific tagging and survey fishery for Atlantic halibut from 2017 to 2021. The purpose of this project is to collect data on the abundance, distribution and biology of Atlantic halibut in the Gulf of St. Lawrence through an industry-supported scientific survey. The survey is a random (location) stratified longline sampling, tagging Atlantic halibut of all sex and sizes that follows the sampling protocol set by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Science. The GNSFPB contributes this data to DFO, as well as produces a brief report with our regional results. This report details the 2021 results of the scientific survey.

The GNSFPB worked with the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association (PEIFA) to divide the scientific stations to be fished off Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. The project specifics were discussed between the GNSFPB, PEIFA and Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) over multiple virtual meetings before the beginning of the scientific fishery for Atlantic halibut.

The GNSFPB was responsible for conducting the scientific survey and tagging for Atlantic halibut at seven stations (18, 20, 23, 107, 108, 123, and 124) (Figure 1). Five harvesters took part in the survey. Each station was allocated 480 kg of halibut to be landed, with a total of 3360 kg of halibut to be caught under the scientific permit (after completion of scientific station). No bycatch was to be landed. After each harvester completed their scientific station, they had the option to quit fishing and not pursue the remainder of their quota, or they could continue fishing at a location of their choosing to catch their quota. Quota from the participants who chose to quit and not fish are transferred to the other participating harvesters.

Despite weather and halibut season openings decreasing the potential days to complete their tagging sites, all harvesters were able complete their scientific sampling trips by October 15th.

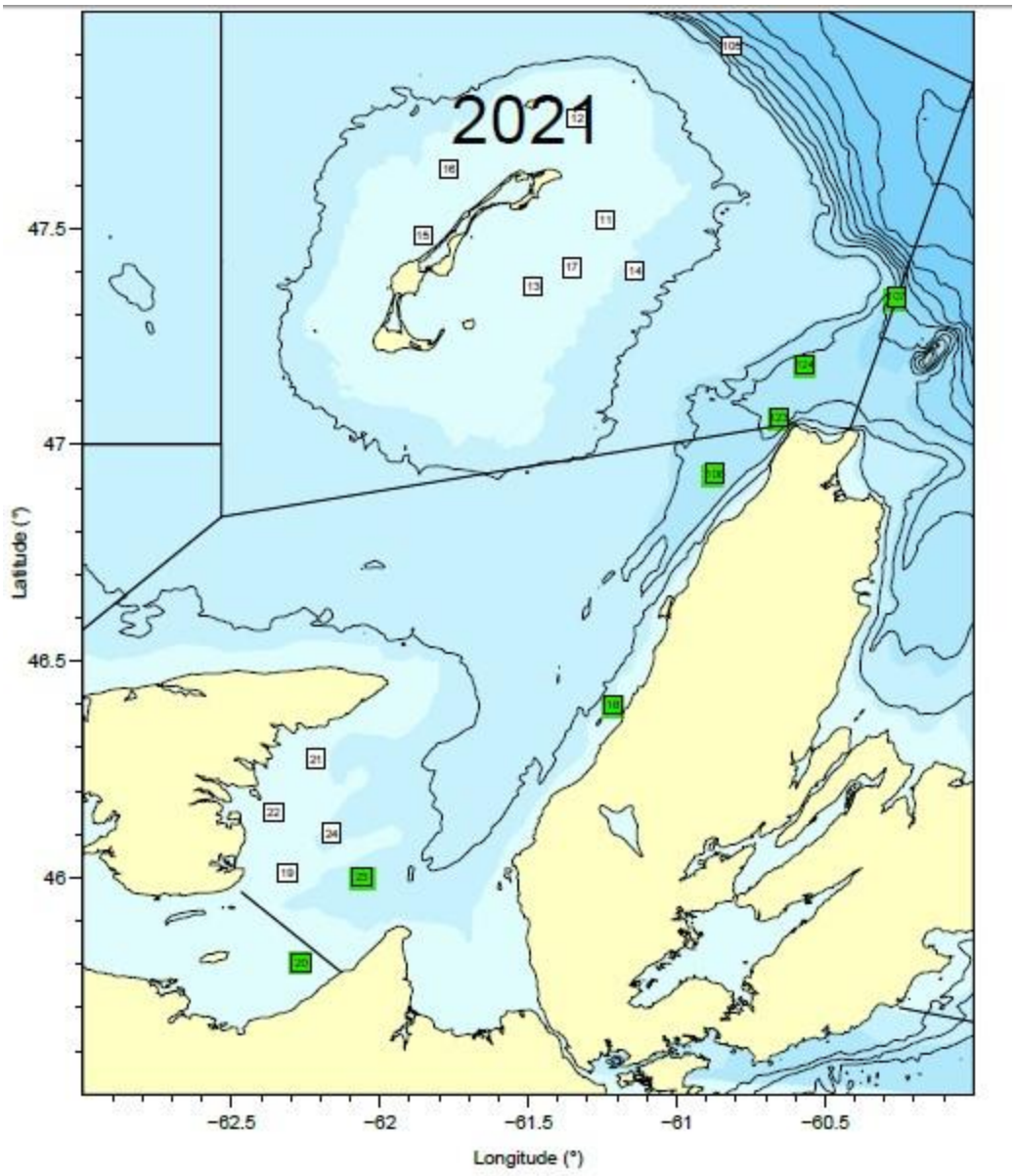

Figure 1. Map of 2021 sampling stations for the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. GNSFPB sites are indicated by the green squares; 18, 20, 23, 107, 108, 123, and 124.

Catch and Cost statistics

Each of the five harvesters went fishing at their assigned scientific site(s). One participating harvester decided not to continue fishing to try and catch their quota on supplementary trips. Three of the five harvesters went fishing on other occasions, with varying levels of success. Participants have until May 14th, 2022 to catch their quota.

Tables 1 and 2 display results from scientific tagging, and landings from additional quota trips. Tables 3, 4, 5 provide a summary of the project related transactions and overall costs.

Table 1. Statistics for 2021 scientific sampling sites.

Name	Site #	Soak time	Halibut retained	Tagged
Charles Elliott	20	5 h	0	3
Cole MacLellan	107	5 h	0	0
Cole MacLellan	124	5 h	0	5
Franklin MacIntosh	123	5 h	0	2
Grant Cameron	18	5 h	0	1
Grant Cameron	108	5 h	0	1
Kevin Reid	23	5 h	0	1
		Total	**0**	**13**

Table 2. Summary of results from the supplementary fishing activities. The quota was adjusted throughout as necessary.

Name	Original quota (kg)	Adjusted quota (kg)	Landed (Kg)	Dressed
Charles Elliott	480	-	-	-
Cole Maclellan	960	-	676.6	Yes
Franklin MacIntosh	480	-	-	
Grant Cameron	960	-	174.4	Yes
Kevin Reid	480	-	482.5	Yes
Total	**3360**	**3360**	**1333.5**	

There were 13 Atlantic halibut tagged across six scientific sites in 2021; site 18 (1), site 20 (3), site 23 (1), site 108 (1), site 123 (2), and site 124 (5). There were zero Atlantic halibut tagged at site 107. There were 6 Atlantic halibut tagged in 2017, 34 tagged in 2018, 40 tagged in 2019, 27 tagged in 2020, and 13 tagged in 2021.

On the additional fishing trips (after science station completion), a total of 1333.5 kg of Atlantic halibut was landed as of November 23rd, 2021. The total allotted quota was 3360 kg, so 2026.5 kg of halibut was left in the water as of November 23rd, 2021. The GNSFPB intends for the remaining quota to be caught in the spring. This remaining quota must be caught by May 14th, 2022. There was no by-catch retained on scientific and additional fishing trips. There were no interactions with species at risk and SARA logs will be submitted on behalf of the project. The remaining allocation quota will be adjusted in the spring based on participation.

Table 3. All financial transactions for harvesters and GNSFPB.

	Share of Stations	Harvester Fees Paid	GNSFPB Reimbursed	GNSFPB Paid	GNSFPB Observer Costs
Charles Elliott	1	$500	$500	$2000	-
Cole Maclellan	2	$1000	-	-	-
Franklin MacIntosh	1	$500	-	-	-
Grant Cameron	2	$1000	-	-	-
Kevin Reid	1	$500	-	-	-
GNSFPB	-	-	-	-	*TBD*
Total	**7**	**$3500**	**$500**	**$2000**	**$**

Table 4: Summary of use of harvester funds collected by the GNSFPB

Transaction	$ Amount	Explanation
Funds Collected	3500	- $500 collected from harvesters per site, to cover 10% observer coverage
Funds Reimbursed	500	- Reimbursed $500 to Charles Elliott for observer fees
Observer Fee		- GNSFPB use funds collected to pay for one trip observer coverage
Funds Remaining	*3000*	- *Remaining funds will be reimbursed to remaining participants*

Table 5: Summary of overall costs for Fleet Planning Board (as of November 23rd, 2021)

Transaction	$ Amount	Explanation
GNSFPB Paid	2000	- GNSFPB paid $2000 per site out of pocket to Charles Elliott

Similar to the previous years' protocol, only 10% observer coverage was required for the additional fishing trips. In order to share this cost fairly amongst all participants, the GNSFPB collected an initial fee of $500 per scientific station (500*7= $3500). The GNSFPB collected $3500. The observer coverage cost did not occur during the fall and will take place during the spring. One harvester opted not to continue fishing, so they were reimbursed their $500 observer fee. The other four harvesters who chose to fish their quotas will be reimbursed remaining funds after the 10% additional observer coverage is covered in the spring. The GNSFPB does not make a revenue from this project.

Review of the Fishery

A lot of work and time went into the coordination of this project and the ongoing issues that came up throughout it (i.e. licence amendments, coordination of tags/sampling kits, arranging observers, discussions with harvesters, etc.). There was no halibut caught at one of the seven scientific sites. Three additional quota trips were completed by December 2021 and there is 2026.5 kg of quota remaining to be caught by May 14th, 2022.

DFO was helpful with this project, working closely with the GNSFPB and responding quickly when requests were made (i.e for licence amendments). DFO ensured that the sampling kits arrived in time allowing the observer company enough tags to follow the protocol. There were numerous requests from GNSFPB as well as Javitech for these kits ahead of time. DFO fishery officers were informed of this project, and there were no issues.

Acknowledgements

The Gulf Nova Scotia Fleet Planning Board would like to thank all the harvester participants who contributed their time and resources to get this project done in coordinated and committed manner; Charles Elliott, Cole MacLellan, Franklin MacIntosh, Grant Cameron, and Kevin Reid. Further thanks to Leonard LeBlanc and Stephanie Delorey for their efforts in liaising between harvesters, other associations, DFO, and observer companies throughout this project. We also would like to acknowledge the timely help we received from DFO's Daniel Lapierre and Mathieu Desgagne.

We note that the above information is simply a summary of the Gulf NS scientific stations and the costs for the GNSFPB. The Scientific Fishery for Atlantic Halibut is a Gulf-wide tagging program that encompasses the entire Gulf of St. Lawrence. Our regional results are submitted to DFO in Mont Joli for continued analysis.

DFO Project Evaluation

1) Did the intended activities take place within scope, within budget?
    a. The project costs were within budget.
    b. The activities were completed within the scope identified. Scientific tagging sites were completed by October 15th. There is remaining quota participants intend to catch in the spring by the May 2022 deadline.
2) Were the resources allocated efficiently and effectively, or given the results would a different allocation have been more appropriate, and if so will be considered for any potential future projects as applicable?
    a. The allocation per site helped to retain harvesters to continue fishing. More allocation in the future will help to increase and maintain participation.
    b. Bycatch should have been landed to help with costs and eliminate waste from bycatch.
3) Were the milestones achieved?
    a. The fishery, scientific and supplementary sites, were sampled within their expected timeframe. Scientific sites were completed by October 15th,2021.
4) Were the deliverables of the project delivered?
    a. The deliverables were delivered (i.e. all scientific sites were sampled and a small amount of tagging was done). Report was sent to DFO.
5) Did the collaboration achieve its purpose?
    a. The GNSFPB questions whether the collaboration achieved its purpose. According to the protocol, “The objective of the project is to collect data on the abundance, distribution and biology of Atlantic halibut in the Gulf of St. Lawrence through an industry-supported scientific survey. This activity takes the form of a random stratified longline survey, as well as the tagging of Atlantic halibut of all size distributed throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence.” There were so few halibut caught during the scientific sampling in the Gulf of Nova Scotia that there was very little data collected on the abundance, distribution, and biology of Atlantic halibut in this area.
6) Were there any difficulties encountered within the performance of the project and if so, how were they managed to achieve resolution?
    a. There was a delay with the beginning of the project with acquiring the licenses as there was a delay in the signing of the five-year agreement with the Quebec Region Senior Management. There were issues acquiring observers for the scientific tagging trips due to a shortage of observers. We used the same observer company as in previous years, so the observers and managers were familiar with the demands (location, timing, requirements) of this project.
    The costs of fishing were high relative to the quota provided.
    As of December 2021, we have 2026.5kg of quota remaining in the water and our participants intend to catch the remaining quota in the spring by May 14th, 2022. Allowing the remaining quota to be caught in the new year will allow our participants to be compensated for their time and efforts. Due to the few trips made in the fall we were unable to complete our 10% observer coverage in the

fall and we plan to get this additional coverage done in the spring when fishing for the remaining allocation.