



Attn: Paul Knapman Intertek Fisheries Certification Ltd. paul.knapman@intertek.com

30 September 2015

Dear Paul,

Re: OCI Grand Banks yellowtail flounder fishery re-assessment

Please accept the following letter as a stakeholder submission as part of the consultation for the re-assessment of Grand Banks yellowtail flounder fishery under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

Established in 1971, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is one of Atlantic Canada's oldest and largest environmental organizations. The Marine Issues Committee of the Ecology Action Centre works locally, nationally and internationally towards conserving and protecting marine ecosystems and maintaining sustainable fisheries and vibrant coastal communities. We have a history of engaging on fishing policy, as well as certification. We are also founding members of SeaChoice, Canada's leading sustainable seafood program, which works with retail partners to improve their seafood purchasing practices. We are submitting our comments as the Ecology Action Centre as well as on behalf of SeaChoice.

Overall, we believe that the available evidence supports the MSC conclusions that the yellowtail flounder (YTF) fishery is well managed and executed. There are reliable assessments of stock status for the directed and retained species. There are only 3 active fishing vessels, their landings are well monitored, there is a relatively high level of observer coverage. We note that while the quota is set by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and that the yellowtail stock is a straddling stock. Currently, Canada is catching ~ 50% of its allocation, and at the 2015 NAFO meeting quota were agreed for 2016 and 2017 for TAC of 17,000 MT. We also note that scientific advice recommended that a TAC as high as 26,300 T in 2016, declining to 23,600t in 2017 and 22,000t in 2018 was not agreed, primarily as a result of relatively low effort on the yellowtail stock. As such, we have no issue with the scoring under Principle 1 in the PRDC.

However, we believe that scoring needs to be altered in three specific areas under Principle 2 (related to retained species, ETP species, and ecosystem structure and function), Please see our recommendations below:





1) The scoring for 2.1.1 is too high. The scoring of 80 fails to take into considering that the total catch of American plaice could potentially triple under the current management strategy. We believe that this should be scored at 60.

The current approach prohibits directed fishing for American Plaice, and places a 15% bycatch limit in the YTF fishery. The average bycatch rate for American plaice has been around 10%. However, the YTF fishery is only currently catching about 50% its total allowable annual catch. About 900t of Plaice is taken annually. If the YTF fully uses it's TAC, under the current bycatch limit, the amount of American plaice caught could increase from roughly 900t to roughly 2700t annually, which constitutes a threefold increase. In order to be "demonstrably effective such that the fishery does not hinder recovery and rebuilding" there needs to be an analysis of recovery potential at this level of catch. We are concerned that if the YTF fishery grows, it could have damaging impacts for American plaice. We suggest a condition is put in place that requires an annual cap on American plaice bycatch at 900t, to ensure rebuilding occurs.

We are also concerned that the high scoring of the habitat section of P2 precludes any incentive for this fishery to engage with the implementation of the Canadian Sensitive Benthic Areas policy. We are pleased to see that the VME indicator species that have been identified by NAFO are included. However, we would also like to note that the Southeast Shoal of the Grand Banks where the majority if the fishing occurs, has been proposed by scientists as a marine protected area, because of its importance for spawning of groundfish, unique populations of molluscs, and feeding ground for whales as a few notable examples of its environmental characteristics.

Sincerely,

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Susanna D. Fuller & Catherine Grant on behalf of the Ecology Action Centre and SeaChoice



