

Manitoba's lake fisheries need improving

For Immediate Release – November 9, 2015 (Vancouver, B.C. and Halifax, N.S.)

Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program released an assessment today recommending people avoid buying fish from Manitoba's three largest fish producing lakes — Winnipeg, Manitoba and Winnipegosis.

Today's assessment, carried out by the seafood program SeaChoice, scored these lake fisheries at a level comparable to some of the most poorly managed fisheries in the world. The fisheries fell short in areas such as understanding of stock sizes and catch rates, lack of catch limits for some species, inadequate data, poorly regulated bycatch, non-enforceable multi-species quotas and absence of harvest control rules. As a result, many fish stocks have collapsed or are severely depleted.

The assessment was prompted in 2012 by the prevalence of freshwater fish for sale without sustainability rankings. "We started out thinking these fisheries would be ranked on the higher end of the spectrum, but quickly became aware of the fisheries management challenges," said Scott Wallace, senior research scientist with the David Suzuki Foundation and SeaChoice member.

Because of its large size, this is an important fishery for reform in Canada. The lakes make up about 80 per cent of freshwater fish —mostly walleye, northern pike, lake whitefish and yellow perch— coming from Manitoba. Manitoba's fisheries are spread over 300 lakes and some years they are as large as B.C.'s salmon fisheries. Some smaller fisheries, like the Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike gillnet have Marine Stewardship Council certification, demonstrating that sustainable fishing practices are possible for larger Manitoba lakes.

"There is no reason why these lakes can't meet minimum standards including precautionary catch limits, improved reporting and publically available information," said Wallace. "A first step would be to offer more resources to the provincial fisheries' branch to improve fisheries practices for these three large lakes."

Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs), which bring the fishing industry, government, conservation groups, processors, distributors and retailers together to improve sustainability also offer a path to reform, said Wallace.

Manitoba's fish are sold in Canada and exported to U.S. markets and overseas. SeaChoice's major retailer partner, Federated Co-operatives Limited, carries large quantities of Manitoba lake fish and has made a commitment to source from sustainable fisheries. "Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) is committed to sourcing walleye and northern

pike from sustainable fresh water fisheries. FCL encourages the Manitoba Lake fisheries to make a commitment to improve fishery management,” said Lisa Sparrow-Moellenbeck of the Federated Co-operatives Limited.

“For many years, high-quality fisheries have provided food, recreation and jobs for generations of people living near and visiting Manitoba’s lakes,” said Tom Nevakshonoff, Manitoba’s Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship. “The review we are launching today will result in a science-based, comprehensive management plan to protect the fish stock and ensure resources are here today and maintained for generations to come. We understand that all Manitobans have a collective interest in the development of sustainable fisheries for years to come.”

According to the Manitoba Government, the review will engage a wide cross-section of those with a strong interest in Manitoba’s lakes and fisheries. Considerations will include further implementation of traditional knowledge, improved data and research, sustainable jobs, past assessments, best management practices from other lakes outside of Manitoba, and assessments of ecosystem health and the long-term connections to healthy fish populations. An initial report is expected by the summer of 2016, with the goal of having a long-term management plan for Manitoba’s fisheries subsequently.

For more information:

Lana Brandt, National SeaChoice manager
778.833.2954 – info@SeaChoice.org

Scott Wallace, Senior Research Scientist, David Suzuki Foundation
778.558.3984

Link to report: <http://www.seachoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Seafood-Watch-Manitoba-freshwater-lakes-Ranking-Session.pdf>