

Marine Conservation Caucus groundfish concerns

Prepared for meeting with Minister Ashfield, July 8, 2011

To ensure sustainable **groundfish** fisheries in the Pacific region, the Marine Conservation Caucus recommends that DFO:

- **Conserve marine habitat:** Finalize the Ecological Risk Analysis Framework after sufficient consultation with stakeholders
- **Support stock assessments:** Maintain funding for Pacific region groundfish stock assessments
- **Improve management of recreational fisheries:** Continue to explore avenues for improving catch accountability and at-sea monitoring for the recreational fishing sector

Background:

- **Marine habitat:** Many commercial fish species use corals and sponges as habitat. However, corals and sponges are easily damaged by several fishing gears used in the Pacific region, and when corals and sponges are damaged or destroyed, commercial species can disappear.¹ DFO science supports the importance of corals and sponges as habitat, and confirms that corals and sponges have limited capacity to recover from the impacts of fisheries.²

Recognizing the importance of managing fisheries impacts on corals and sponges, DFO has produced a national policy to manage impacts of fisheries on sensitive benthic areas, and a new Pacific Region Cold-Water Coral and Sponge Conservation Strategy to guide management of impacts on corals and sponges. Both tools depend on an Ecological Risk Analysis Framework (ERAF). Though DFO has been working on the ERAF for several years, it has not been finished. Without the ERAF, none of DFO's other marine habitat policy pieces can be implemented. Therefore, we request that DFO consult with stakeholders and complete a scientifically sound ERAF as soon as possible.

- **Stock assessments:** Rigorous and up-to-date stock assessments are essential for sustainable fisheries, and benefit stakeholders and the resource. They are the cornerstone on which responsible fisheries management decisions are made. The Pacific region groundfish fisheries are challenging in this regard, due to the number of species that are targeted and/or caught. Despite the challenging economic times, DFO should, at the very least, maintain current funding for Pacific region groundfish stock assessments.
- **Recreational fishery:** The recent allocation controversy between the recreational and commercial fisheries for halibut highlighted the gap in catch monitoring and accountability in the two sectors. While the MCC does not involve itself in allocation issues, we took a position in this case as the allocation decision may have had conservation implications. Commercial groundfish fisheries in the Pacific region have taken expensive and time-consuming steps to implement 100% at-sea and dockside monitoring, which supports their efforts to full accountability for all commercial species caught. For this reason, government and stakeholders have a clear understanding of what these fisheries are removing from the ocean. In comparison, the recreational sector has no at-sea monitoring and weaker accountability for catch of both target and bycatch species. For this reason, the MCC believes that measures to improve catch monitoring and catch accountability in the recreational sector should be a priority for DFO.

¹ Du Preez, C., Tunnicliffe, V. 2011. Shortspine thornyhead and rockfish (Scorpaenidae) distribution in response to substratum, biogenic structures and trawling. *Marine Ecological Progress Series*, 425, 217-231.

² DFO, 2010. Occurrence, susceptibility to fishing, and ecological function of corals, sponges, and hydrothermal vents in Canadian waters. DFO CSAS Science Advisory Report 2010/041.