



The Ecology Action Centre Recommendations for Atlantic Mackerel Management 2026

March 11, 2026

Todd Williams
Chair, Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee
Senior Director, Resource Management
Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Dear Todd,

The Ecology Action Centre appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on management of Atlantic Mackerel for 2026 following the recent Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee meeting. The Ecology Action Centre works locally, nationally and internationally for better fisheries management, strong ocean protection, traceable and transparent seafood supply chains and sustainable livelihoods. We work in communities and on the water, with advocacy informed by science and socio-economic expertise as well as Indigenous and local knowledge. We have been members of the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee and Maritimes Mackerel Advisory Committee for over a decade and are part of the Mackerel Rebuilding Working Group.

Maintain current two-year ministerial decision

We write to reiterate our management recommendation that the current two-year ministerial decision remain in place for the upcoming 2026 season. This approach is consistent with the measures implemented in 2025 and includes the continued closure of the commercial fishery until the stock has rebuilt out of the Critical Zone, along with an allocation of up to 500 tonnes for the personal bait fishery and other scientific needs.

Maintaining the commercial closure aligns with projections from the most recent stock assessment. The intent of the multiyear decision was, in part, to reduce uncertainty in the coming years and to allow space at advisory tables for focused discussion on other important priorities. These include exploring joint science initiatives to address outstanding questions raised by stakeholders, improving our understanding of ecosystem considerations and their potential impacts on distribution and spawning, and planning for the eventual reopening of the commercial fishery once the stock has rebuilt out of the Critical Zone.

We also want to emphasize that reopening the commercial fishery at this time would not be consistent with the legal requirements of the rebuilding plan or the Precautionary Approach framework.

The current scientific advice is robust, peer-reviewed, and indicates that the stock remains firmly within the Critical Zone. The age structure of the stock and the lack of recent recruitment events are also deeply concerning.

Given the current condition of the stock, the Sustainable Fisheries Framework requires that the Precautionary Approach guide management decisions. Any total allowable catch above 500 tonnes would not align with the Precautionary Approach or with the rebuilding plan's objective of maintaining at least a 75 percent probability of stock growth ($SSB_{2027} > SSB_{2025}$) over the two-year period.

While the recent stock assessment in the United States suggests some improvement, there remains a high degree of uncertainty associated with that assessment, and the apparent improvements appear to be driven primarily by the southern contingent of the stock, which is unaffected by Canadian fishers. Canada's rebuilding efforts are focused on the northern contingent, which does not show the same signals of recovery. It would therefore not be appropriate to use the United States stock assessment as a catalyst to change course in Canada.

For these reasons, maintaining the existing two-year management decision is the most responsible course of action to support the rebuilding of the stock and the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

Ensure process and transparency for off-year stock assessment

At the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee meeting that took place in February, we learned that the Minister of Fisheries has initiated a last-minute, off-year stock assessment for Atlantic Mackerel due to reports from industry that they are seeing an abundance of Atlantic Mackerel across the East Coast.

We expect that the off-year assessment will adhere to all standard procedures and will remain open to external scientists and experts, as is customary. This includes undertaking a fulsome CSAS peer review process, as would have proceeded in a typical stock assessment year. We also ask that consultation with the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee follows the completion of the stock assessment and prior to making any decisions for the upcoming season that would change the current two-year management regime.

Conclusion

In line with the best available science and with the legal requirements to rebuild this stock, maintaining the current ministerial decision to continue the closure of the commercial Atlantic Mackerel fishery for 2026 is crucial.

We once again thank you for the opportunity to provide our recommendations. We look forward to providing our comments on the new stock assessment and working collectively towards the rebuilding of this important forage fish stock and an economically viable commercial fishery in the future.

Sincerely,
Holly Isnor



Fisheries Program Manager
Ecology Action Centre

