
The Ecology Action Centre recommendations on Unit 1 Redfish Management for 2026

We thank Fisheries and Ocean Canada for the opportunity to provide our recommendations on the management of Unit 1 Redfish as discussed at the Redfish Advisory Committee meeting held on April 7th, 2026. The Ecology Action Centre works locally, nationally, and internationally to advance fishing policies and practices that minimize harmful impacts on the marine ecosystem while benefiting coastal communities and supporting thriving fisheries.

During this year's meeting, it was positive to see that overall bycatch caps were adhered to and that at the same time, landings increased for the 2025-2026 season. We also heard that there has been some progress on developing and capturing markets for Canadian Redfish. We do, however, remain concerned that catches continue to be a small portion of Total Allowable Catch (TAC), and that the necessary bycatch caps will limit this fishery if catches increase in future years. We note once again that this will be a limited time fishery due to Redfish boom and bust population dynamics, regardless of harvest rates, and should be treated as such - with cautious optimism and a common understanding that this is short term, limited economic opportunity that is not worth risking other already depleted stocks to prosecute.

We support the comments of others around the table to hold these meetings in person, and in sequence with the Gulf Groundfish meeting in the future. Opportunities to connect on these issues in person are valuable for facilitating productive discussions on fisheries issues and often result in more progress toward common ground. There were also several overlapping issues between the Gulf groundfish Advisory and the Redfish Advisory that would have benefitted from having the meetings closer together. We recognize the challenges with scheduling this year and look forward to connecting with those around this table in person next year.

Our recommendations for the 2026-2027 season remain consistent with previous years. We recommend:

- A rollover of the current TAC of 60,000t
- Maintaining the current management measures in place for area, season, depth and gear restrictions
- Maintaining bycatch limits for white hake and cod including a 1% per trip limit
- Maintaining a 1% per trip limit for Atlantic halibut
- Maintaining current requirements for At-sea Observer coverage and continue electronic video monitoring pilots

Total Allowable Catch

The 2025 estimate of the spawning stock biomass (SSB) of *S. mentella*, estimated in 2025 at 1,439kt places the stock well into healthy zone of the precautionary approach framework. On the other hand, the 2025 estimate of *S. fasciatus* is just 229 kt, only slightly above the proposed Upper Stock Reference of the precautionary approach. There is also uncertainty of this estimate, and a significant barrier in identification and selectivity between these two species of Redfish. This makes it important to proceed with caution when setting TACs for both species despite the high abundance of *S. mentella*.

Given this need for caution and relative low catches of only 15.2% of the 2025-2026 TAC, we recommend a rollover of the TAC of 60,000t for the upcoming year. There is no evidence that an increase in TAC would be utilised or is necessary to maximise economic returns from this limited-time fishery at this time. A lower TAC also gives room for flexibility in management measures that a larger TAC would not.

Harvest Control Rules

We support the development of Harvest Control Rules for the Unit 1 Redfish fishery, incorporating both *S. mentella* and *S. fasciatus*. The TAC is set for both species combined, but the health of these two stocks differs considerably. We also know that the abundance of *S. fasciatus* comes from the 2013 recruitment event, and none have been observed since. Developing an HCR will provide guidance that will ensure decisions are not made under pressure, promote stability, predictability, and a longer-term trajectory for this fishery.

Management measures

Over the past two years, many stakeholders around the table have voiced their request that the Department provide more flexibility in the management measures for this fishery. While we recognise that the measures in place for this commercial fishery are extensive and prescriptive, they are also necessary to limit impacts of this fishery on other fish stocks, fisheries and the wider ecosystem. It is the responsibility of the Department to set cautious management measures that ensure the protection of ecosystems, habitat, target and non-target species. We expect this precautionary approach for the 2026-2027 season. Where possible, the Department has provided flexibility on some of these to support the prosecution of this fishery. We recommend no further changes to the management measures for area, depth, season, and gear restrictions for the upcoming season.

Bycatch management

At the outset of this commercial fishery, there was a common understanding that there would be strict bycatch limits in place that were likely to be reached before the target TAC and that once reached, fishing would stop. We continue to see a high rate of bycatch relative to target landings. Although it is positive that overall bycatch caps were adhered to, some fleets exceeded their respective bycatch caps by a significant portion. We recognise and support the Department's efforts to be more flexible by re-distributing bycatch amongst fleets and sub-fleets and are pleased that this approach worked for the 2025-2026 season. We continue to be concerned that bycatch will become a more substantial problem as catches increase and more fleets participate in the fishery. We continue to support and stress the need for 1% per trip limits for cod, white hake and Atlantic halibut for 2026-2027.

We do not support the adjustment of any bycatch limits to make this limited-time and low-value fishery more economically viable. We do not want to see a repeat of past management decisions where stocks landed in the critical zone. With rebuilding plans now legally required and implemented, any adjustments to these caps based on economics cannot be justified.

Fisheries monitoring and reporting

We know that there has been reduced capacity in Canada's At-sea Observer program for several years and that this created challenges for ensuring all fisheries in Atlantic Canada have appropriate EM requirements in place and are able to meet them reliably. There is interest in improving at-sea observer programs and developing EVM further, but resources are needed to prevent this work from stalling. We note the [Green Budget Coalition](#), representing over 25 of Canada's leading environmental organizations, continues to recommend this critical investment be included in the next federal budget (see pg. 40). We are extremely concerned that reports from conservation and protection officers in Newfoundland included such widespread issues with compliance and reporting. This is of particular concern as the fishery is new, and bycatch caps are restrictive. Hearing the myriads of compliance challenges including reporting errors and omissions, unauthorised discarding of bycatch and discrepancies between fisher and observer reports underline the need for strengthened monitoring requirements.

We also ask that for future Redfish Advisory Committees there be an update from conservation and protection from each participating region, including detailed slides.

We congratulate both Fisheries and Oceans and the fishers for the continued testing of electronic video monitoring. We recognise that electronic monitoring systems take time to get right and require an investment of time and money to implement and maintain. The update provided on the pilot project running for the last two years in Québec region was positive to hear and is a good example

of the flexibility and persistence needed to find solutions that fit specific fisheries. We look forward to hearing the outcomes of this project once data is analysed for last season.

Research has also shown that EM on board can result in behaviour changes and increased compliance regardless of the specificity of the catch data that is captured. There have been many instances of reporting improvements following electronic video monitoring implementation.

We do not support any reduction in coverage requirements for this fleet. This is a new commercial fishery, with known compliance and reporting issues and strict bycatch limits. Reducing coverage requirements to account for limited At-sea Observer resources is not a solution.

Redfish Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

We reiterate our comments from last year on the committee membership and Terms of Reference. Fisheries are a public resource and management decisions impact not just industry and governments but entire ecosystems, coastal communities, and future generations. NGOs and civil society groups are critical and legitimate stakeholders who bring a breadth of expertise and represent public and ecosystem interests during public resource decision making. NGO participation and membership is explicitly included in the Terms of Reference for many advisory committees and should also be included in the Terms of Reference for this table. The Department is the decision-maker around membership and has been clear that NGOs are valuable members of fisheries advisory committees. We look forward to the finalisation of the Terms of Reference for this committee, with EAC and other ENGOs being full members of the committee.

Sincerely,
Holly Isnor



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Ecology Action Centre