

DFO NL Region Response to NL OSW RA Interim Report

16 May 2024

Commercial fishing data:

With regard to commercial fishing data and Recommendation 25: *DFO compile and analyze logbook data based on offshore wind licensing areas identified by the C-NLOER, to aid in setting strategic priorities for the call for bids:*

DFO utilizes logbook data to the extent possible, given constraints, to map commercial fishing data. For many fisheries conducted by fishing vessels < 35 feet, harvesters are not required to provide locational data (aside from port landed), therefore, it is difficult to accurately map specific fishing locations for some fisheries in this fleet sector. Since records for these vessels are non-georeferenced, there was a section included in DFO's response to the Committee's August Request for Advice dedicated to "Small Vessel Fishing Activity within the Focus Area" in an effort to ensure that the importance of the Focus Area to vessels < 35 feet is not overlooked.

For vessels > 35 feet, given constraints, as much data from logbooks as possible is utilized. Logbook data with erroneous locational data (e.g., provided coordinates that are on land or not within the indicated area of fishing) must be removed. The data must then be privacy screened to meet confidentiality requirements under the *Privacy Act* and the *Access to Information Act*. DFO conducts privacy screening through the Rule of Five: any area with either less than five fishers, licence holders, or vessels, is removed. This is based on NAFO statistical areas, which are smaller than NAFO zones shown in the Atlas and are not publicly available.

The commercial fishing data in the Canada Marine Planning Atlas is meant to represent an estimate of fishing intensity. The hexagons represent data from a 10 km² area for a ten-year period (2012-2021). It is important to note that privacy screened areas do not indicate an absence of fishing, rather that the area in question has not met the Rule of Five screening criteria. Some examples of this which overlap the preliminary licensing areas include Redfish, Turbot, and Tuna. Gears in these areas include Dredge, Bottom Otter Trawl, and Pelagic Longline. This is particularly important in the case of mobile fisheries. It is also important to note that removal of high density fishing areas based on the All Species data layer could bias removals to fisheries with higher overall catch weights. It is recommended that fisheries be assessed on a species and/or gear type level on a project-specific basis to ensure smaller scale fisheries are captured.

The gaps associated with the commercial fishing data in the Atlas and what was provided in response to the Committee's Request for Advice are a result of the constraints outlined above. Given these constraints, the logbook data is analyzed and mapped to the extent that is accurately possible. Therefore, DFO suggests not including this recommendation in the final report. As an alternative, DFO can analyze the available data and provide a fisheries overview based on offshore wind licensing areas identified by the C-NLOER. DFO has provided location-specific fisheries overviews to other government departments for areas that are being considered for marine conservation initiatives. These types of overviews would consist of identifying a percentage of fishing activity in the area of interest compared to the total fishing activity in the NAFO zone; however, it may not be possible to display maps associated with these products due to privacy screening and/or data constraints.

If this is of interest to the Committee, we can work together on developing a new recommendation pertaining to these fisheries overviews.

Additionally, the Interim report states *At time of writing, no advice was received from federal authorities regarding Marine Refuges or Fishery Closure Areas and their inclusion in the Committee's constraints analysis.* However, DFO provided a spreadsheet of fisheries closures within the Focus Area in response to the Committee's Request for Advice. The Interim Report also states *since these specific areas are adjacent to the shore, the currently established Marine Refuges and Fisheries Closures, including an additional buffer, was avoided in preliminary offshore wind licencing areas by removing a 10 km coastal buffer around the island of Newfoundland.* It is recommended that the Committee consider fisheries closures that are not designated Marine Refuges, including those where fisheries are restricted due to spawning areas of valuable commercial species, as DFO provided information on closures that are outside of the coastal buffer and within the Focus Area.

Vessel traffic data:

The Interim Report states *The Canadian hydrographic service (2024) vessel traffic route dataset does not include known vessel routes into Stephenville and Corner Brook. The Committee has requested DFO to provide an update on if these routes will be included in the publicly available geospatial dataset. Updates have not been received to date.*

DFO did not receive a request to provide an update on these vessel routes. DFO recommends utilizing the vessel density dataset for 2012 to 2021 available on the Atlas.

General Committee recommendations for future research:

DFO suggests that the Committee provide clarification on some of the more general recommendations regarding future research that do not identify a lead authority. For example,

19. The Committee recommends further work in defining migratory routes within EBSAs prior to issuing call for bids, in consultation with the applicable regulators.

33. Federal agencies (e.g., DFO, ECCC) begin a sustained series of surveys and programs to develop the basic information regarding the marine physical and biological environment in the Focus Area.