

MEDIA RELEASE

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WWF-Canada warns that small fish are in big trouble

Report reveals three fisheries are in critical condition

ST JOHN'S, August 2, 2016 — WWF-Canada is warning that forage fish are in trouble, following their new assessment of Canadian fisheries, released today in their report [Food for All](#). These small fish are vitally important to starving predators such as whales and seabirds, as well as critical to the recovery of commercial fisheries such as northern cod.

Assessing 27 fisheries against 9 criteria, the WWF-Canada report determined:

- Three fisheries are in critical condition in Atlantic Canada: two herring stocks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Atlantic mackerel. Another fishery of concern is the herring in southwest Nova Scotia/Bay of Fundy.
- In 75 per cent of the fisheries assessed, the stock status is unknown, including all capelin fisheries, and all the fisheries in British Columbia.
- In all cases, fisheries management does not sufficiently account for predator needs.
- The effects of the environment and climate change on forage fish are largely unknown.

What are forage fish?

- Forage species are small fish, such as herring and capelin. They are among the most abundant in the ocean by mass.
- They are an important source of food for a range of predators. Some species, such as humpback whales, minke whales, and harbour seals, depend on forage fish for 75 per cent of their food.
- Small fish are very susceptible to environmental changes.
- Forage fish are vulnerable to overfishing because they congregate in shoals so are easy to catch even when the stock is declining.

WWF-Canada is working to:

- Secure food for starving predators including beluga and humpback whales, seabirds and northern cod
- Modernize fisheries management to account for the needs of multiple species
- Strengthen eco-certification of forage fish fisheries
- Find alternatives to using forage fish as bait in commercial fisheries such as lobster
- Protect spawning beaches for commercial and non-commercial forage fish.

Quotation from **David Miller, president and CEO of WWF-Canada:**

“Populations of large predators like humpback whales, along with seabirds and commercial species such as cod, will never recover if they don’t have enough food to eat. It’s shocking that many of these fisheries are being managed without adequate information about the stocks. WWF Canada’s report demonstrates that there is a lot of work to be done, protecting the forage fish that underpin the health of our ocean ecosystems.”

Report is available online at www.wwf.ca/newsroom/reports/oceans.

About World Wildlife Fund Canada

WWF-Canada creates solutions to the environmental challenges that matter most for Canadians. We work in places that are unique and ecologically important, so that nature, wildlife and people thrive together. Because we are all wildlife. For more info visit www.wwf.ca.

For further information

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