



FFAW | UNIFOR
Fish, Food & Allied Workers

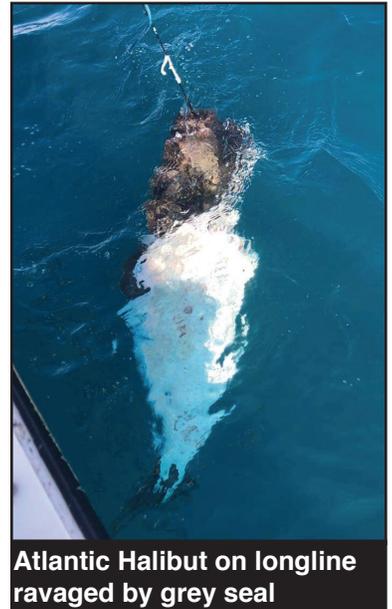
SEALS: Threat to Healthy Ecosystem & Rebuilding Stocks

On August 14, 2019 the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Jonathan Wilkinson, announced that his government would be establishing a task team to study the various seal populations on our coasts. However in addition to up-to-date science, it's critical that concrete action be taken to protect important rebuilding stocks.

Without a doubt, there is an overpopulation of harp and grey seal populations in our region. There is significant predation within the ecosystem that has an impact on northern cod and capelin stocks, which presents serious concerns to the ecosystem as well as to the people who rely on a healthy marine environment for their livelihood.

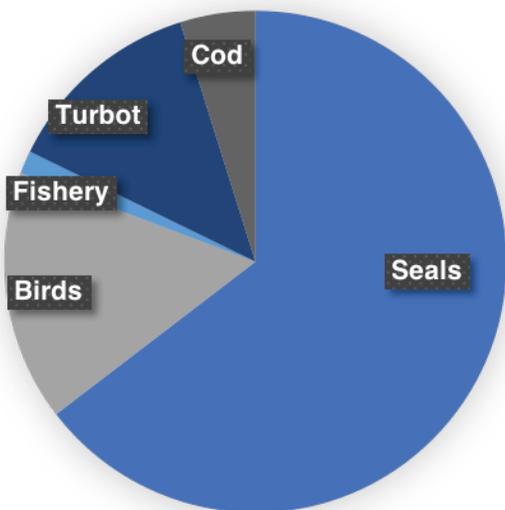
The seal population has expanded from 2 million animals in 1970 to upwards of 8 million, although an accurate estimate is unknown due to a lack of science.

In the 2003 Stock Status Report for 2J3KL cod, the average trawlable biomass of cod in the research autumn bottom trawl survey between 1999-2002 was stated to be 28,000 t.



Atlantic Halibut on longline ravaged by grey seal

Capelin Consumption Northwest Atlantic



“Consumption of cod by harp seals in 2000 is estimated from diet studies to have been about 37,000 t (95% confidence interval of 14,000-62,000 t). Most cod represented in such studies are small. Harp seals also prey on large cod by consuming only soft parts, and such predation has been frequently observed.” – DFO Stock Status Report, 2003

If seal consumption of cod has simply doubled, which is likely a vast underestimation, that still estimates 74,000t of cod being eaten by seals annually, in stark contrast to the modest 12,350t set for this year’s Stewardsip Fishery.

According to the 2019 Southern Gulf Science Advisory Report, “Extremely high natural mortality of cod 5 years and older is the reason for the lack of recovery of this stock.”

“Predation by grey seals is concluded to be the main cause of the elevated natural mortality of this cod stock over the past 20 years,” the report stated.