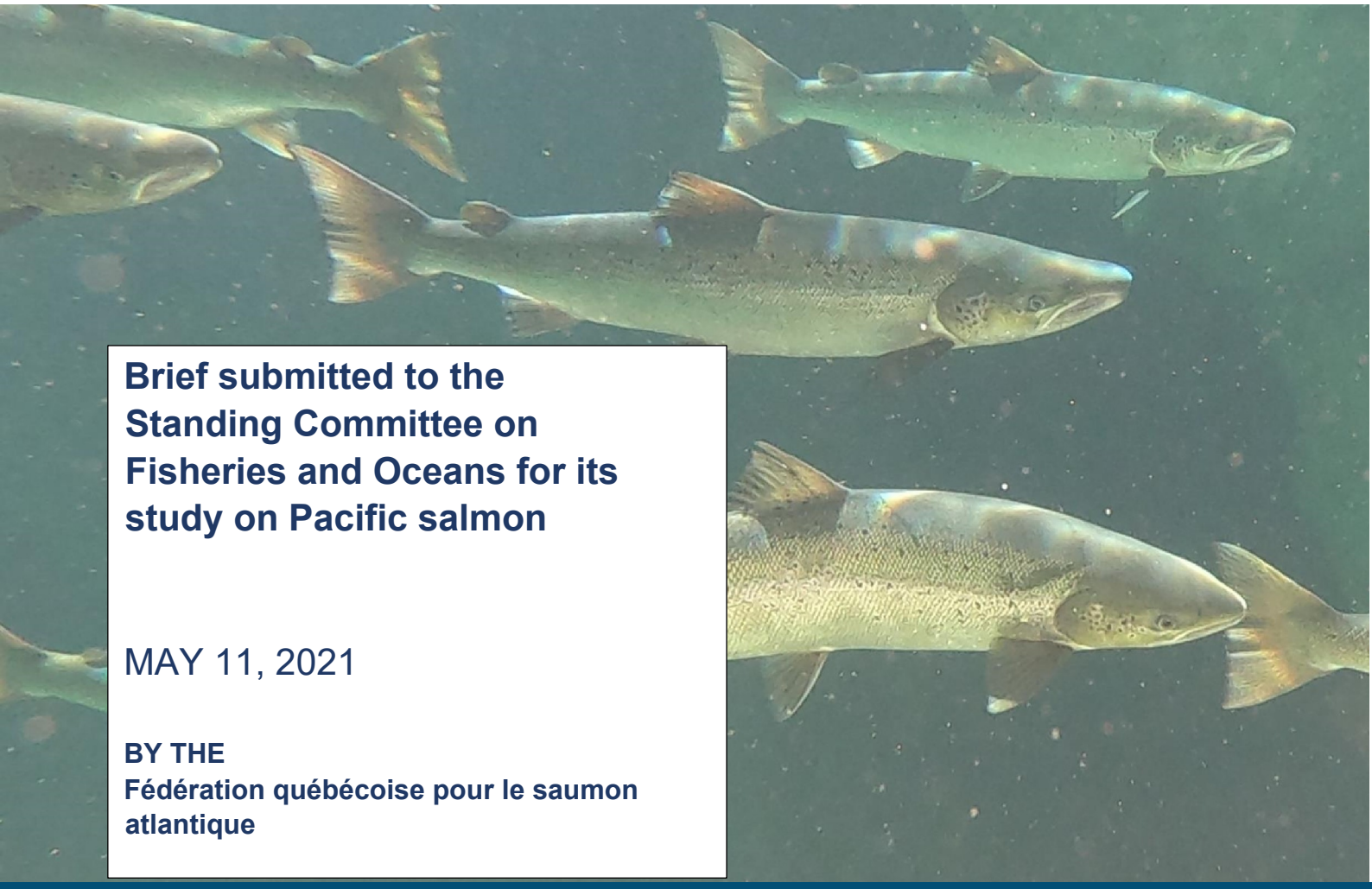

Brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for its study on Pacific salmon

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BY THE
Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique

FQSA
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1. Executive summary

The Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique (FQSA) represents its members who are delegated the management of Atlantic salmon by the Quebec Department of Forests, Wildlife and Parks (MFFP), anglers and other Atlantic salmon stakeholders. The FQSA was invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans as part of the Pacific salmon study because of its expertise in managing salmon populations and conserving fisheries resources, including wildlife habitats.

1. "River by river" management: a sustainable development approach

The FQSA appreciates the rigour and approach of Quebec's world-renowned Atlantic salmon management model. The "river by river" approach helps fine-tune the management of the salmon resource, which is needed to ensure the sustainability of this iconic species. Moreover, in recent presentations made as part of the assessment of Atlantic salmon stocks by COSEWIC, the MFFP clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the 2016 management plan and the encouraging results for the resource.

Quebec has developed tools and a community-based management network for sport and traditional Indigenous fisheries that has proven its effectiveness using some of the most stringent recognized monitoring requirements. In fact, scientific models for determining the conservation thresholds to be reached in terms of returns are well developed, and rigorous monitoring is done annually on many rivers. Returns on nearly 40 rivers are counted each year, in addition to sampling and measuring individuals. Anglers are required to report their catches, a very important source of data. Catch-and-release sport fishing is very popular and, thanks to significant investment in education, we have been very successful at educating our fishing community about best practices. As a result, nearly 90% of releases are reported (FQSA survey, 2020) with a 97% survival rate. In 2020, 69% of the catch was released, and total returns have increased by an average of 19% over the last five years.

2. Possible listing of Atlantic salmon on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (SARA)

Listing Atlantic salmon as a species at risk, which is currently being considered by COSEWIC and DFO, would jeopardize the strength of this management and monitoring network for Atlantic salmon populations, including anglers, the public, wildlife organizations, salmon river management agencies, and the provincial and federal governments. Anglers actually generate revenues that are reinvested in the conservation and monitoring of the resource. The "river by river" approach meets the highest international standards in terms of fisheries monitoring and sustainable development, which engages anglers and the public in the conservation of wildlife resources and the fisheries environment.

3. Status of Atlantic salmon populations

There are five species of Pacific salmon native to Canada, while Atlantic salmon are the only salmon species in eastern Canada. Pacific salmon are in critical condition and Atlantic salmon are of special concern, although in Quebec we are fortunate to have healthy populations. We should not wait for the Atlantic salmon to be in the same state before taking action, especially since the difficulties experienced in the United States and in the Maritime provinces could extend to Quebec. The FQSA appreciates the Canadian government's efforts to negotiate quotas for the Greenland fishery, which is also having a positive impact on Atlantic salmon stocks,

although we still need to work on bycatch in commercial fisheries along its migration route. Climate change, environmental issues, water quality, free passage of fish and aquaculture are just some of the issues that must remain on the Committee's agenda.

2. FQSA comments

2.1 "River by river" management: a sustainable development approach

The MFFP's most recent Atlantic salmon management plan was rolled out in 2016 and will run until 2026. A cycle of monitoring, evaluation and optimization of this management plan is in place, with the Quebec government working closely with the FQSA, which represents delegated sport fishing management organizations throughout Quebec. This collaborative and continuous improvement approach could be used as a starting point in both western and eastern Canada. This approach is used in Quebec for developing management plans for each wildlife species of socio-economic interest, so it could be exported to Pacific salmon management.

In addition to working with the non-profit Atlantic salmon sport fishery management delegates, this plan also involves a great deal of collaboration with First Nations, in the interests of respect for Aboriginal rights and dialogue. Indeed, it is necessary to collaborate and reconcile needs and uses according to the status of salmon populations. Salmon must remain the focus of the management plan, as their conservation is essential to the uses we wish to make of them.

The management plan's approach is also aimed at the sustainable development of the sport fishery. The Atlantic salmon sport fishery generates the most economic impact per day/fish sold, $730 per day/fish based on 2012 data (EcoResource, 2013). Quebec reaps more than $50 million in direct and indirect benefits annually (MFFP, 2016). These revenues are reinvested regionally into conserving and protecting Atlantic salmon, in addition to contributing to the vitality of regional recreational tourism. Angler education and outreach activities, particularly with respect to catch and release best practices, are also successful. There has been significant growth in the popularity of catch-and-release fishing, which is already having a positive impact on salmon populations. With a very high success rate (97% survival rate), salmon are able to reproduce and perpetuate the species. Anglers are avid nature lovers and are actively involved in salmon conservation.

Having regional organizations implement this model leverages local knowledge and tailors salmon resource management to each river. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans could benefit from Quebec's expertise in adapting the model to the management of Pacific salmon. A "river by river" management policy is a perfect example of the asymmetry necessary to promote actions suited to each river's unique challenges.

FQSA recommendation

The FQSA recommends that the Government of Canada use the Atlantic salmon "river by river" management model for the management and recovery of Pacific salmon populations. Implementing this model with regional organizations and First Nations leverages local knowledge and tailors salmon resource management to each river. This type of management policy presents the necessary asymmetry to promote actions suited to each river's unique challenges and the biological reality of the wildlife species.

2.2 Possibility of adding Atlantic salmon to the list of wildlife species at risk under SARA

Based on the criteria used by COSEWIC and the detailed analysis of the presentations made to COSEWIC during the fall 2020 assessment of the status of Atlantic salmon populations, which have been stable or slightly growing over the past 15 years (three generations), the FQSA believes that the status of Atlantic salmon populations does not warrant listing it as a wildlife species at risk. Furthermore, there are enough inaccuracies, omissions and even errors in the 2008 COSEWIC analyses to justify not considering it as a sufficient basis for granting any species at risk status for all DUs that concern Quebec.

FQSA recommendation

The FQSA believes it is appropriate to recommend the following to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans:

- The Minister's decisions must be based on the latest study of the status of Atlantic salmon populations, the report of which will not be tabled until a few months from now.
- COSEWIC should revise its analytical framework and adopt one that is more appropriate for anadromous species.
- The status of a population should, as a priority, consider the population's status in relation to its specific conservation threshold.
- Segmentation into DUs should take into account more than just genetic criteria, particularly demographic criteria, oceanic migration patterns, and the management approach.
- The most important recommendation of all: for biological, socio-economic and legal reasons, no Quebec salmon population should be added to the list of wildlife species at risk under the current situation.

2.3 Status of Atlantic salmon populations

Five species of Pacific salmon are native to Canada, while Atlantic salmon are the only salmon species in eastern Canada. The status of Pacific salmon is critical and that of Atlantic salmon is of concern, although in Quebec we are fortunate to have healthy populations. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous section, the status of Atlantic salmon populations has stabilized over the past 15 years, and we are also seeing increases in some cases, which supports the effectiveness of the "river by river" management plan.

We should not wait until Atlantic salmon are in the same predicament as Pacific salmon before taking action, especially since the difficulties experienced in the U.S. and the Maritime provinces could extend to Quebec.

Although integrated resource and land management work is underway in the salmon river watershed in Quebec, the major issues of climate and environmental change are evolving across policies and boundaries. Other important issues affecting both the Government of Canada and other levels of government include water quality, fish passage and aquaculture, which are just a few examples that must remain on the Committee's agenda.

The FQSA acknowledges the Canadian government's efforts in negotiating quotas for the Greenland fishery, which is also having a positive impact on Atlantic salmon stocks, although we still need to work on bycatch in commercial fisheries along its migratory route.

This makes it essential to develop cross-cutting integrated management of Atlantic salmon, as the threats are interrelated both for salmon conservation and for the sustainable development of its fisheries. It is essential for the different levels of government to work in consultation and collaboration with each other in order to define flexible management frameworks adapted to local conditions, applying the principles of subsidiarity of sustainable development. This way, we will implement integrated management of salmon and its rivers, bringing about the convergence of actions. The Quebec Atlantic salmon management model is an interesting example that could be used by the Canadian government, and the sharing of expertise would ensure the conservation and sustainable development of our salmon resources.

FQSA recommendation
The FQSA recommends developing integrated management of Atlantic salmon, as the threats are interrelated for both salmon conservation and the sustainable development of its fisheries. It is essential for the different levels of government to work in consultation and collaboration with each other in order to define flexible management frameworks adapted to local conditions, applying the principles of subsidiarity of sustainable development.

3. Conclusion

In closing, the FQSA wishes to thank the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for consulting us for the Pacific salmon study.

Salmon is a species that is emblematic of environmental quality, aquatic habitats and water quality. Protecting it helps maintain an entire ecosystem and many other species. A highly migratory species, salmon allows us to protect the aquatic environment on a large scale, which is of paramount ecological value. In addition, its fisheries generate significant economic benefits, and proper management can make it a driver of sustainable regional development. Salmon is also of great socio-cultural value to both First Nations and non-First Nations Canadians.

As the official representative of Quebec's salmon fishers and river managers, the FQSA reiterates its recommendations that the Quebec management model be used for the management of Pacific salmon. Furthermore, given effective management and the positive status of Atlantic salmon in Quebec according to the latest data, we strongly recommend that it not be listed as a wildlife species at risk. Lastly, we wish to stress the

importance of developing integrated management of salmon with the provinces and local organizations in order to address global issues and ensure the sustainability of salmon and its fisheries.

4. Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique

The Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique (FQSA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 to unite and represent the interests of all stakeholders of the Quebec salmon industry. Its work is focused on the conservation and protection of Atlantic salmon. Uniting all salmon river management organizations as well as over 1000 individual members, the FQSA represents the interests of its members, which include management organizations, sport fishers, Indigenous communities, salmon outfitters and any group with an interest in the conservation and management of Atlantic salmon. It represents not only 12,000 salmon fishers, but also, more generally, all stakeholders who care about safeguarding salmon farms and the salmon resource.

The members delegated to manage Atlantic salmon (ZECs, wildlife reserves, sections 36-37) make up a robust network of non-profit organizations with a proven track record of being able to conserve and sustainably develop Atlantic salmon and its rivers.

The FQSA promotes sport fishing as a tool for conserving and protecting Atlantic salmon, and advocates community-based management of the resource, in keeping with Quebec's unique "river by river" management approach. In addition to enabling optimal management of stocks, this approach also allows the Federation to make Atlantic salmon a true driver of sustainable economic development, both regionally and nationally.

Through its affiliation with the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), which includes the northeastern U.S. states and Canada's maritime provinces, the FQSA is also involved in the North American and international management of Atlantic salmon. It is recognized as a non-governmental organization by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), which includes all Atlantic Ocean coastal countries.