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Description of the Inshore Fishery during 1991 for 2J3KL Cod as Reported by
Inshore Fisherpersons

by

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Summary

Observations from inshore fisherpersons on the progress of the 1991 inshore cod fishery in NAFO divisions 2J, 3K and 3L are presented as background information for the 1992 CAFSAC stock assessment process. The 1991 inshore fishery in 2J3KL has generally been described by fisherpersons as a "complete disaster". However, trap landings for the entire area are slightly above average when compared with trap landings over the past sixteen years. The largest drop in landings occurred in the gillnet fishery, particularly in the Virgin Rocks and Forty Fathom Edge area of Division 3L and in Division 2J.

Résumé

On présente ici les observations des pêcheurs quant à la progression de la pêche côtière de la morue dans les divisions 2J, 3K et 3L de l'OPANO en 1991, ces renseignements servant au processus d'évaluation des stocks du CSCPCA pour 1992. La pêche dans les divisions précitées en 1991 a été dans l'ensemble qualifiée de «totalement désastreuse». Toutefois, les débarquements de morues capturées à la trappe sont légèrement supérieurs à la moyenne de ceux des seize dernières années, et cela dans toute la zone. C'est dans la pêche au filet maillant, particulièrement dans la région de Virgin Rocks et de Forty Fathom Edge de la division 3L et dans la division 2J, que le recul des débarquements a été le plus marqué.

Introduction

The 1991 inshore fishery in NAFO divisions 2J, 3K and 3L has received considerable scientific, political and media attention due in part, to a very late start in most areas, a poor capelin fishery, unusual environmental conditions and a perception among fisherpeople that overall catches are the worst in at least fifty years. While many areas which have consistently experienced stable and profitable trap fisheries suffered through their worst season in memory, the annual total for trap landings in 2J3KL is slightly above average for the period 1975-1990 (Baird et al. 1991).

Landings from the 1991 gillnet fishery were considerably lower than previous years and experienced the largest proportionate drop of all gear sectors. An description and analysis of this failure can be found in Baird et al. (1992).

This paper describes events in the inshore fishery of 1991 in a number of areas of divisions 2J, 3K and 3L (Figure 1) and presents observations from fisherpersons as reported to the DFO inshore fisheries biologist for Newfoundland and Labrador Region. I have verified general trends in landings where information is available but most of the information falls outside of data gathering systems employed by DFO. Observations on fish stocks obtained from inshore fisherpeople are usually difficult to verify in any empirical sense and the information generally should not be extrapolated to areas outside of the geographic regions in which it was obtained. However, this is not to suggest that fisherpersons' observations are not without value. A successful inshore fishery has occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador for centuries, carried in part by the wisdom of generations of fisherpersons passing information on without the benefit of observations from the scientific community.

Division 2J.

Ice cover and cold water delayed the start of the fishery until late August. Landings of cod were measured by the fish in most places and not by the pound or kilogram. Labrador fisherpersons observed that although shallow and deep water gear types experienced highly variable landings from year to year, one or the other was usually successful. This pattern has apparently disappeared in the last few years and all gear types in all depths are reported to be failing. Fisherpersons in areas which consistently had a shallow water fishery with trap leaders tied on shore have in recent years moved up to twenty five miles offshore in search of fish. There were sporadic reports of capelin rolling on beaches in September in numbers that had never been observed for that time of the year.

Division 3K, St. Anthony to Fogo Island.

Ice cover and cold water delayed the start of the fishery along the east coast of the Northern Peninsula, White Bay, Green Bay, the Baie Verte Peninsula and the area around Change, New World and Fogo Islands. Landings were low in all areas although trap fishing along the east coast of the

Northern Peninsula was moderately successful in late August and early September. It should be noted however, that it is not unusual to see Japanese cod traps in the water until the first of November in some of these areas. The fall fishery appears to have been good in many areas. Fisherpersons were reporting satisfactory catches with hook and line and jiggers into November. There were also November reports of a gillnet fishery which was landing "a good run of thick fish". In early 1992, fisherpersons from Hall's Bay reported up to 140 kg per day being landed from jigging through the ice in 100 m of water.

The information content of adjectives used to describe the fishery in a particular area is highly variable. In some areas which experienced no fish at all until late in the autumn, "a good run of thick fish" often meant two or three days of two or three 75 kg "pans" of fish whereas in other years, it might mean several weeks of fishing which yielded 200,000 kg of fish.

Division 3K, Fogo Island to Cape Freels.

Fogo Island was also plagued by ice cover and cold water until late July. However, nominal effort is high in the area and when fish did strike in to traps berths, overall landings were high. Fogo Island and Twillingate fisherpeople report that some aspect of the bottom topography around Fogo Island causes fish to remain in the area for approximately two weeks after they have left other adjacent areas. There were many subjective reports of high landings of small fish (< 45 cm).

Division 3L, Bonavista Bay.

Most areas of Bonavista Bay had a poor fishery in 1991. As in other areas, the fishery was late starting and landings were low. Considerable effort was directed toward the crab fishery and this may account for some of the variability in cod landings. Morale among fisherpersons directing effort toward cod was extremely low in all parts of Bonavista Bay and it was difficult to engage in long conversations in many communities.

Division 3L, Trinity Bay.

Fisherpersons in the southern part of Trinity Bay experienced an early spring fishery which they attribute to a nearshore stock of fish. There is concern for this nearshore stock of fish since catches have apparently been dropping over the past two decades. Much of the early decline is attributed to foreign overfishing in the bays prior to the declaration of the 200 mile limit. The causeway to Random Island has also been blamed for disrupting the movement of the stocks around the island and interfering with spawning.

Landings and patterns of landings were highly variable around Trinity Bay in 1991. There was considerable damage to gear from ice in May and June and the fishery was approximately three to four weeks late starting. The southern end of the bay had an extremely poor fishery while areas around Random Island had the highest landings that fisherpeople had seen in years. Old Perlican, which traditionally has a good fishery, had an extremely bad year. A number of trap crews travelled around the Avalon Peninsula to St.

Mary's Bay and set their traps where ever it appeared they might catch fish.

Division 3L, Conception Bay.

The northern end of Conception Bay was plagued by ice and cold water and as in all other areas, the fishery was three to four weeks late starting. Landings were down considerably from 1990. Once the fishery did start, many trap berths and sections of coast could not be fished due to grounded ice bergs or moving ice.

Division 3L, Southern Avalon.

Although the fishery was two to three weeks late in starting and there was a short strike, fisherpersons along the southern Avalon Peninsula experienced high landings and many reported that 1991 was their best year. Cod stomachs were full of capelin for most of July although reports of capelin rolling on beaches were very sporadic during that time. Most fisherpersons reported that fish were of a very good size for trap fish.

Division 3L, St. Mary's Bay.

St. Mary's Bay fisherpersons reported an average year with the fishery starting on time. Early landings were reported to come from a bay stock of fish. Gonads were ripe in fish landed in June.

References

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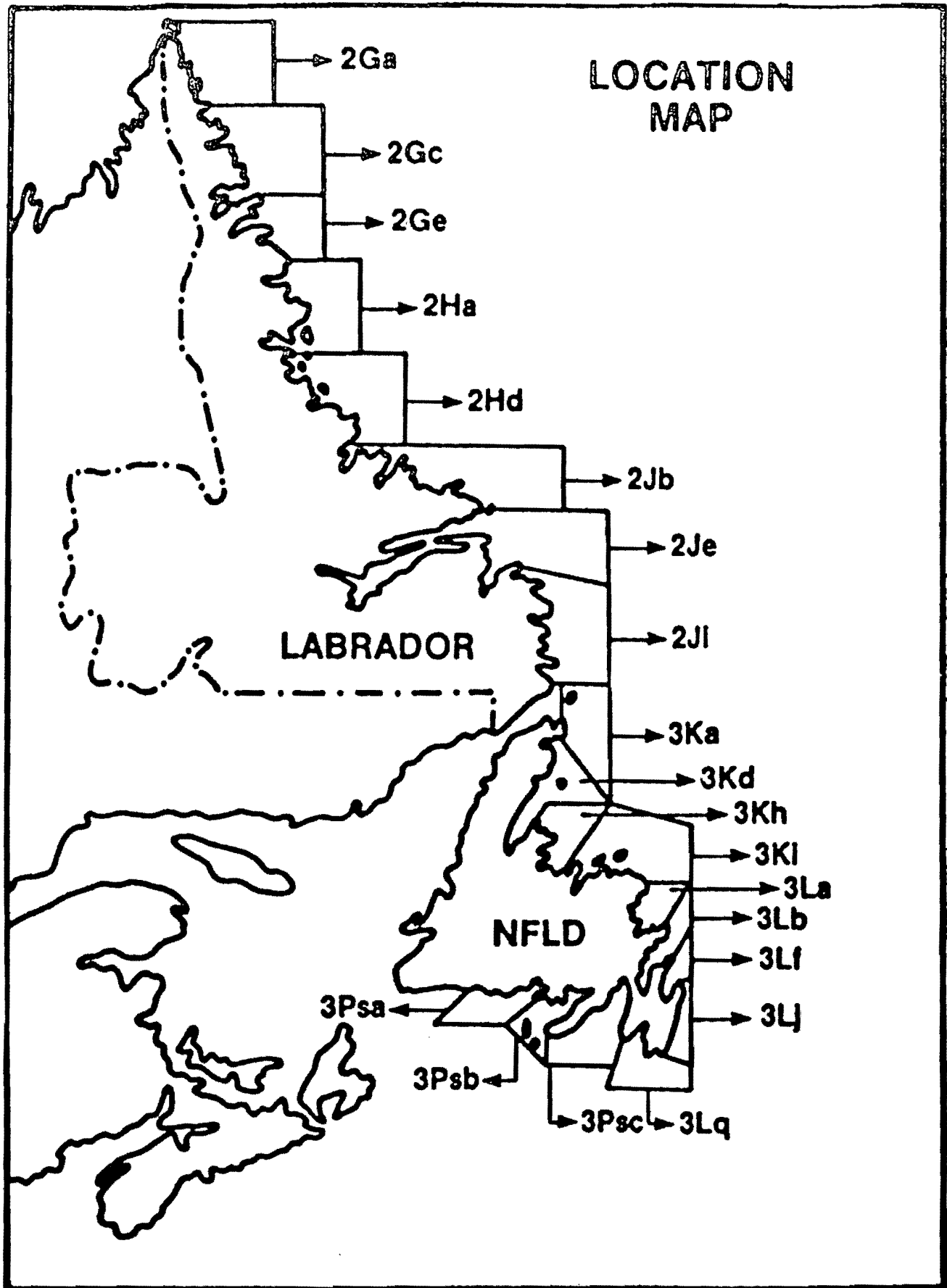


Figure 1. NAFO Divisions and survey unit areas.