

Photo credit: Megan Lynch

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023

| Eastport  
| Marine Protected Areas



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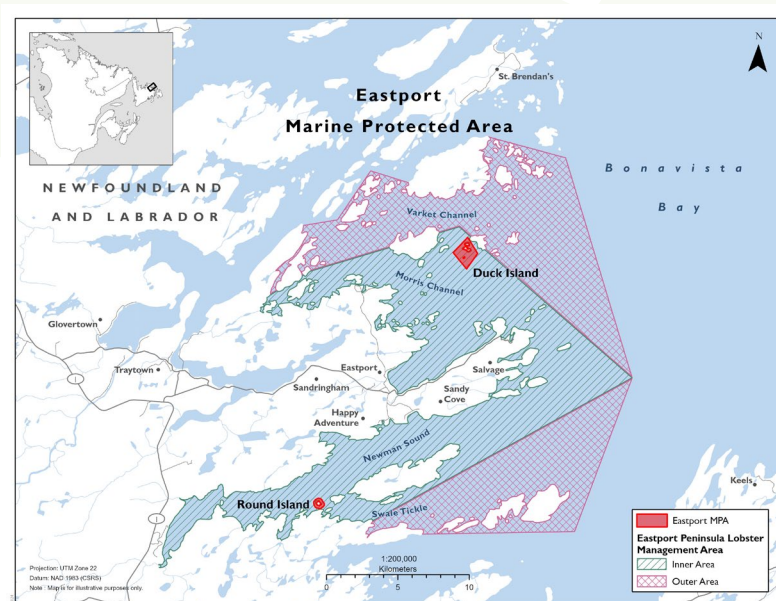
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## At-a-glance

### Date of designation:

2005

### Size:

2.1 km<sup>2</sup>

### Contribution towards the marine conservation targets:

< 0.01%

### Location:

These MPAs are located in Bonavista Bay, in the Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) Bioregion; Atlantic Ocean

### Managed by:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)

### Zones:

The Eastport MPAs are comprised of 2 geographically separate MPAs - Duck Island Marine Protected Area and Round Island Marine Protected Area, which are both within a 400km<sup>2</sup> Eastport Peninsula Lobster Management Area (EPLMA).



Photo credit: Megan Lynch



## Key highlights

Two key highlights for Eastport MPAs in 2023 were the publication of the 2023 to 2028 Eastport MPAs Management Plan and the appointment of a new co-chair to the Eastport MPA Advisory Committee on behalf of the Eastport Peninsula Lobster Protection Committee. A local lobster harvester from the community of Salvage was voted into the role at the 2023 Advisory Committee Annual General Meeting held in Eastport.

In addition, a new monitoring component introduced in 2023 has provided an opportunity to collect and interpret acoustic and visual marine mammal data from Bonavista Bay to help fill knowledge gaps of marine mammal movements in coastal NL waters.



Photo credit: Annamarie Buchheit



## In the spotlight: benefits

### Ecological

The waters of the Eastport Peninsula support a wide range of marine species. The no-take MPAs relieve human pressures, such as fishing, and provide protection to the species and habitats within the MPA boundaries. The shallow waters around Duck Islands MPA and Round Island MPA are rich with plant and animal life. Some common commercial species found in the area include:

- lobster
- cod
- capelin
- herring
- mackerel
- crab

The sea floor is rocky with marine plants, such as eelgrass, Irish moss and various species of kelp and rockweed. The MPA supports the biodiversity in the area.

### Socio-cultural

The Eastport MPAs management and monitoring have been supported by the local residents and harvesters of the Eastport Peninsula Lobster Protection Committee since 2005. Their on-going involvement in the Advisory Committee and carrying out the ecological monitoring programs has nurtured ocean stewardship in the region that extends from voluntary lobster management programs to ocean conservation and protection. Local lobster harvesters are passionate about contributing to the stewardship of the MPAs, and sharing their knowledge and experience with other harvesters within and around the Eastport Peninsula and with DFO scientists.

### Economic

The Eastport MPAs provide economic benefits to the local community by hiring experienced lobster harvesters to carry out annual monitoring programs. By training local harvesters in ecological sampling collection techniques, more employment opportunities exist after the regular harvesting season is complete.

In addition, the Advisory Committee continues to support the allocation of commercial fishing licenses in LFA5 (Inner) to harvesters from the 7 core communities within the Eastport Peninsula Lobster Management Area. By limiting the fishing pressure near the MPAs, the economic growth will benefit harvesters on the Eastport Peninsula.



## Education and outreach

In January 2023, a public meeting and science briefing for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) Sub-division 3L lobster harvesters was led by Resource Management Branch of DFO to present current status of the Lobster stock and receive feedback and questions from stakeholders. Representatives of the MPAs advisory committee were in attendance to share information pertaining to the Eastport Peninsula area, promoting conservation efforts



Photo credit: Megan Lynch

and the importance of harvester involvement in resource stewardship.

Around the communities, Eastport MPAs advisory signs that were originally created and installed in 2012 were replaced in 2023 due to excessive environmental exposure. These updated signs were placed at public docks and boat launches around the Eastport Peninsula. The signs include boundary coordinates and a map of the closed areas in relation to the surrounding communities to promote awareness of the MPAs and support the reduction of accidental movements into the closed areas during recreational and commercial fisheries.



## Research and monitoring

Two on-going annual monitoring programs occur in Eastport MPAs – the spring at-sea sampling program and the fall tagging program. Both programs were successfully carried out in 2023. These monitoring efforts are carried out by local harvesters and/or members of the Eastport Advisory Committee. In addition, new in 2023, Passive Acoustic Monitors were deployed in June 2023 to listen for the presence of marine mammals in coastal NL waters. These devices were placed near both Duck Islands MPA and Round Island MPA, at depths of around 100 metres.

The latest Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) science advisory report, [“An assessment of the American Lobster \(\*Homarus americanus\*\) stock status in Newfoundland \(LFAs 3–14C\)”](#) (DFO



Photo credit: Victoria Howse

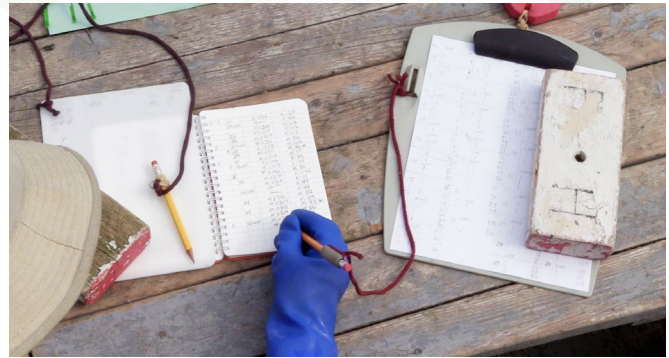


Photo credit: Todd Fowler

2023/029) was published in 2023. Data from the Eastport MPAs monitoring programs were contributed to the stock assessment process. The Eastport MPAs are located within the Northeast Coast assessment region, in LFA 5. The key takeaway from this assessment pertaining to the Eastport MPAs indicated that the population size structure showed a larger range of sizes caught in the Northeast Coast region, with more lobster surviving to attain larger sizes (i.e., more than 92 mm carapace length). Recent improvements in recruitment appear to be associated with more favorable oceanographic habitat conditions.

Anecdotal evidence from members of the Advisory Committee have noted increased otter predation on lobster on the Eastport Peninsula. Photo and video evidence has been captured of otters consuming lobsters along the coast, and shell discards, habitat alteration in and around the MPAs and otter carcasses from drownings in lobster traps.



Photo credit: Nadine Templeman



## Collaborations and partnerships

Internal collaborations between DFO Science (Marine Mammals group) and the Marine Environmental Quality program has led to a new monitoring component being introduced in 2023. This has provided an opportunity to collect and interpret acoustic and visual marine mammal data from Bonavista Bay to help answer questions of marine mammal movement in coastal NL waters. Two Passive Acoustic Monitors were deployed east of Duck Islands MPA and two east of Round Island MPA to record marine mammals. This data will be analyzed in 2024.

An important collaboration between Marine Planning and Conservation Program and the Conservation and Protection Division of DFO ensures effective surveillance and enforcement of the MPAs. Conservation and Protection carries out surveillance activities regularly, with added focus at peak times during the fishing season to ensure all harvesters are adhering to the MPAs' regulations.



## Surveillance and enforcement

The Marine Planning and Conservation Program and Conservation and Protection Division work together to provide surveillance and enforcement in the three MPAs of the NL Region.

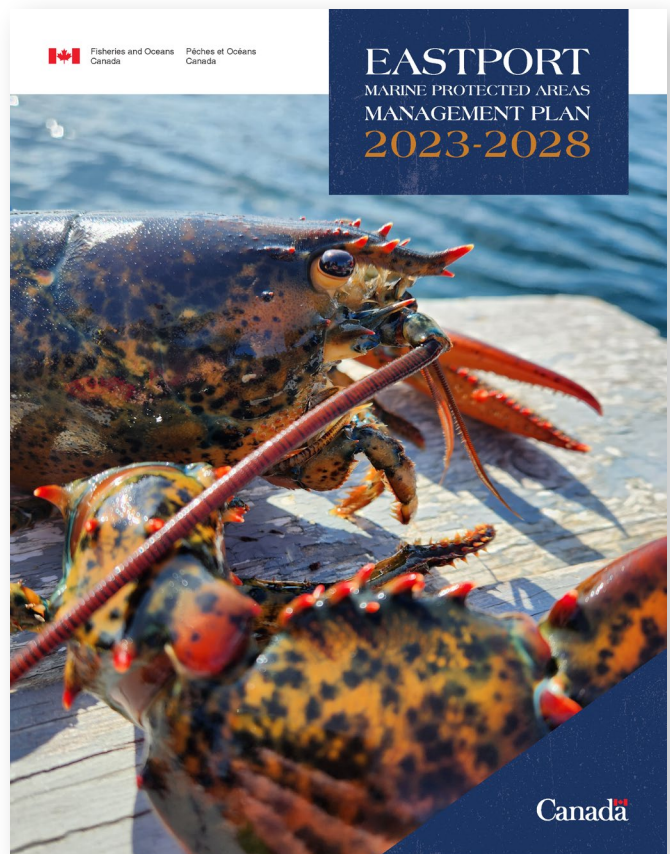
Increased monitoring and surveillance activities required for the MPAs occur at peak fishing times adjacent to each area. The Eastport MPAs Advisory Committee, which includes local fishers, has identified enforcement concerns with respect to poaching during the summer months when tourism is at its peak (i.e., July – August). The early fall season (i.e., September – October) is also identified as a potentially vulnerable time of year for poaching when local harvesters are carrying out the Fall monitoring program and recreational cod fisheries are ongoing. Patrols by Conservation and Protection Division during these identified periods will be provided in the Eastport Peninsula

area using marked and unmarked patrol boats, and if the opportunity arises, one air surveillance patrol will be conducted over the Eastport MPAs.

Violations in Eastport MPAs have been less common as public awareness increased, with zero violations in 2023. To further support this, signage has been placed at all docks and slipways in the local communities, that indicate the boundaries and regulations of the MPAs.



Photo credit: Todd Fowler





## Management and governance

In 2023, a new iteration of the Eastport MPAs management plan was designed, published and printed. The plan was drafted by DFO and approved by the MPAs Advisory Committee. This new plan will guide the management of the MPAs from 2023-2028. Results from the previous ecological monitoring programs and surveillance and enforcement operations are detailed in the management plan.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Eastport MPAs Advisory Committee was held in Eastport in April 2023. It was attended by:

- local harvesters
- representatives from various DFO programs
- other stakeholders

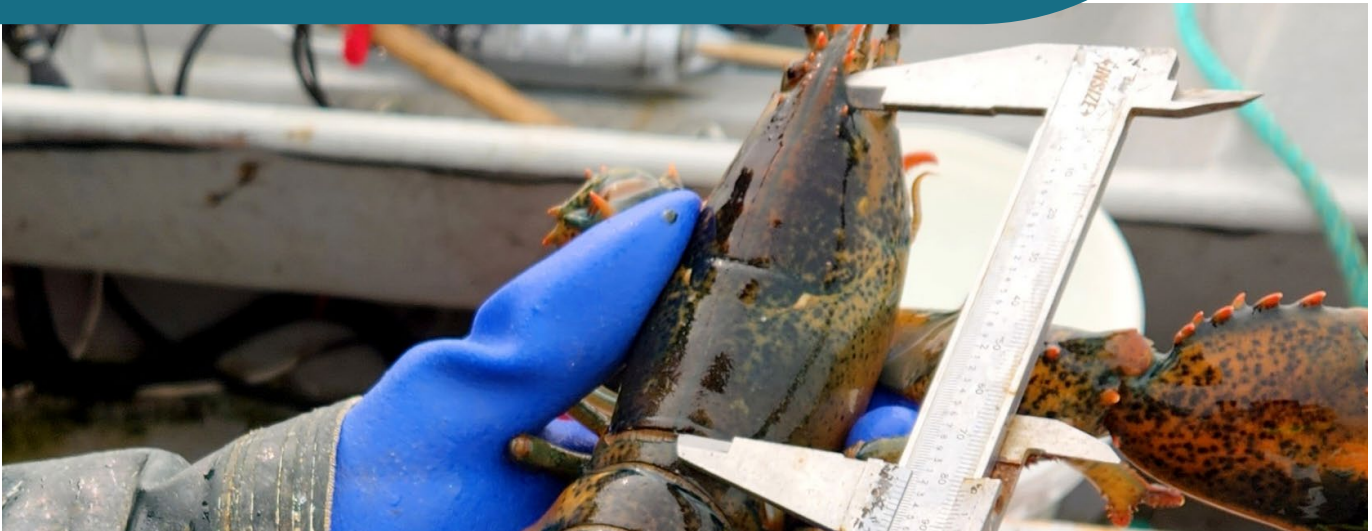
At the AGM, a new co-chair was appointed to the Advisory Committee on behalf of the Eastport

Peninsula Lobster Protection Committee. A local lobster harvester, with many years of experience on the Advisory Committee and conducting the MPA monitoring programs, was voted into the role. The previous co-chair remains an active member of the Advisory Committee.

A multi-year activity plan was approved for 2023-2028 for the annual fall monitoring program. After the lobster harvesting season is over, this monitoring program occurs in September and October. Population distribution and demographics are recorded for all lobsters that are caught in various size traps, they are then tagged and returned to the water. The fall tagging program was carried out by two teams of experienced fish harvesters. Two members of the Eastport MPAs Management Team were able to join the harvesters at the end of September to experience the program on the water.

## Looking to the year ahead

Upcoming plans for the MPAs in 2024 include a focus on education and outreach efforts. A community newsletter will be distributed locally to encourage ocean literacy and provide a platform for community members to discuss conservation topics and contribute to community stewardship. Updated signage and interpretive panels will be installed on popular beaches around the Eastport Peninsula where tourism is high, to increase the public awareness of the MPAs. To enable the assessment of lobster movement patterns in the area, a tag return program is being developed to encourage local harvesters to return physical information about commercially-caught tagged lobster.



Crédit photo : Megan Lynch



Published by:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E6

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Cat. No. Fs1-102E-PDF ISSN 2818-6931

Correct citation for this publication:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2025. Eastport Marine Protected Area (MPA) annual report 2023. Annual report. Eastport Marine Protected Area. 8 p.