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April 15, 2026

2026 Management Recommendations for Gulf Small Pelagics

OCEANA CANADA LETTER TO DAVID GIARD AND MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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April 15, 2026

David Giard
Senior Regional Officer
Gulf Region
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
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RE: 2026 Management Recommendations for Gulf Small Pelagics

Dear David Giard and members of the Advisory Committee,

Background

Oceana Canada is an independent charity established to restore Canada's oceans to the richness, health, and abundance they once supported, and is proud to be a part of the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. We respectfully work with civil society, academics, fishers, Indigenous Peoples and governments. As an engaged member of fishery advisory committees across Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) regions, we advocate for science-based fisheries management that rebuilds fish populations and strengthens the economic and nutritional benefits they provide to fishers and coastal communities, now and in the future. This letter contains our 2026 management recommendations for 4T Atlantic herring, spring and fall spawning components.

Recommendations

1. **Follow the rebuilding plan and maintain the commercial moratorium for the spring spawning component of 4T Atlantic herring.**
2. **Remain cautious and implement a 12,000 tonne quota for the fall spawning component of 4T Atlantic herring.**

We provide more detail on these recommendations below.

1. **Follow the rebuilding plan and maintain the commercial moratorium for the spring spawning component of 4T Atlantic herring.**

The spring spawning component of southern Gulf herring has been in the critical zone for the last two decades. The stock has deteriorated to a fraction of its historical levels, and continues to suffer from low recruitment, high natural mortality, declining weight-at-age,

and continued environmental changes. Given the poor state of the stock and continued negative outlook, Oceana Canada recommends that DFO follow all rebuilding plan management measures, including maintaining a full closure of the commercial and bait spring fisheries, to retain the potential for stock growth.[1]

Although this stock remains in serious decline following decades of mismanagement, the slight increase in the spawning stock biomass indicates that the rebuilding plan may be supporting early signs of improvement, and that continued caution is required. Given the episodic fluctuations of forage fish populations and their capacity for strong year classes to rapidly alter productivity, continuing the commercial closure to ensure removals are kept to an absolute minimum provides the best chance for recovery.

2. **Remain cautious and implement a 12,000 tonne quota for the fall spawning component of 4T Atlantic herring.**

The fall spawning component of southern Gulf herring has entered the lower bound of the healthy zone after a decade of being depleted. While current projections seem optimistic, DFO Science cautions that long-term projections should be interpreted carefully, particularly as future outlook depends on sustained high recruitment. Further, the population's recent growth is projected to level off by 2027.

As the stock still suffers from high natural mortality, declining weight at-age, and continued environmental change, like the spring spawners, DFO must proceed cautiously. Ocana Canada urges DFO to ensure that this recent population increase translates into a durable spawning stock biomass (SSB) in the coming years. Supporting the continued growth of fall spawning is best achieved through cautious harvesting approaches. Therefore, we recommend that DFO implement a quota of no more than 12,000 tonnes for this stock.

Oceana Canada also urges DFO to ensure that any quota increase for the fall spawners is accompanied by strict monitoring measures to minimize the incidental catch of spring spawners.

Regulatory Guidance

Section 6.1(1) of the Fish Stocks provisions mandates the Minister to implement management measures to maintain major fish stocks at levels that promote their sustainability, taking into account the biology of the stock and environmental conditions.

Section 6.2(1) of the Fish Stocks provisions mandates that if a major fish stock has declined to or below its limit reference point, the Minister must develop a plan to rebuild the stock above that point in the affected area, taking into account the biology of the fish and the environmental conditions affecting the stock, and ***implement it within the period provided for in the plan***. (Emphasis added).

[1] DFO. Rebuilding plan: Atlantic Herring, *Clupea harengus*, spring spawner component - NAFO Division 4T

Ecosystem Approach

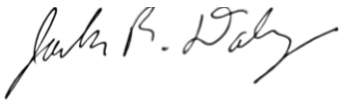
To support long-term sustainability and resilience of marine ecosystems, DFO should advance its ecosystem approach to fisheries management toward a more comprehensive ecosystem-based management framework. Such an approach would align with international best practices and more fully account for species interactions, habitat, climate change, and cumulative impacts across fisheries.

Atlantic herring represent an opportunity for DFO to demonstrate best practices in forage fish management by fully integrating ecosystem and climate considerations into both science and management frameworks.

Conclusion

The 4T Atlantic herring stocks, like other forage fish, face cumulative pressures from warming waters to fishing mortality. **The spring spawning component benefits from federal protection under the Fish Stocks provisions, and the commercial and bait moratorium must remain in place to give this seriously depleted population the opportunity to rebuild.** The fall spawning component, by contrast, has benefited from cautious management in recent years and now supports a limited increase in catch provided DFO monitors the long-term health of the stock. Oceana Canada appreciates the opportunity to provide input and remains committed to supporting efforts to rebuild both 4T herring spawning components to a healthy state.

Sincerely,



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