PO Box 10, Station C
368 Hamilton Avenue, 2nd Floor
St. John's NL A1C 5H5

FFAW | UNIFOR
Fish, Food & Allied Workers

Tel: 709.576.7276
Fax: 709.576.1962
Web: www.ffaw.nf.ca

GREG PRETTY
President

JASON SPINGLE
Secretary-Treasurer

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Ian Murphy
Environmental Assessment Officer
C-NLOPB
240 Waterford Bridge Road
The Tower Corporate Campus – West Campus Hall Suite 7100
St. John's, NL A1E 1E2

Mr. Murphy,

The Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) would like to respectfully submit the following comments in connection with the project description for a seismic program as proposed by Multiklient Invest AS (MKI) & TGS-NOPEC Geophysical Company ASA (TGS) and the Draft Environmental Assessment Scoping Document for 2024-2028, requesting our review.

Seafood landed in Newfoundland and Labrador by the inshore fleet is processed in the province and exported internationally. Our industry relies heavily on global markets and is subject to profit fluctuations with market prices, fuel costs and the value of the Canadian dollar. Seismic programs add an additional layer of complexity to fishing seasons. Harvesters have justified concerns surrounding reports of reduced catch rates immediately after a seismic vessel has entered an area where fishing is taking place in addition to uncertainty surrounding the long-term effects on fish and fish habitat due to seismic.

FFAW contends that seismic surveys can directly impact economic return for harvesters. In 2022, the seafood industry was valued at $1.4 billion and as such, represents an incredibly important ocean stakeholder operating completely throughout the spatial scope of this offshore seismic project.

First and foremost, the area currently presented is extremely large in scope. It is therefore difficult to offer comment on the specific impacts to the fishing industry without knowing more spatial and temporal plans of proposed survey programs. Fishing seasons for each species are location and time specific and can vary from year to year. It is imperative that there is an effective flow of information between the fishing and seismic industries several months prior to the start of each seismic season such that early engagement can occur, and plans can be adapted, if necessary.

There is no mention within this report of the Northeast Marine Slope Refuge therefore it is not evident whether consideration has been given to exclude this area. We question whether there will be additional mitigation measures put in place to ensure marine conservation targets in this area are met considering in 2024, it is anticipated that MKI will acquire approximately 5000–10,000 km^2 of seismic data in the Orphan Basin. Marine conservation must be meaningful and consistent while acknowledging that this refuge near the Orphan Basin is closed to all fishing activities. Heightened awareness and consideration in this region must be given to turbot, crab and shrimp fishing areas and seasons as their spatial extent has already been reduced.

Increased seismic prospectivity has heightened awareness of just how much traditional fishing grounds harvesters have lost, and continue to lose, due to oil and gas occupation. Seismic surveys occurring from mid-May through September and will undoubtably interact with most commercial fishing seasons. Given the extent of the project area, consideration must be given to snow crab, Northern cod, sea cucumber, capelin, herring, monkfish, skate, white hake, lobster, and Northern shrimp fishing areas and seasons. Additionally, any annual changes to these fisheries must be considered as well as any new fisheries that may emerge within the 2024-2028 timeframe.

The fishing industry contends that critical data gaps exist in the research regarding seismic activity and behavioral changes of fish/shellfish. Increasing research has shown that seismic survey activity results in behavioral changes amongst commercial fish species. While these changes have been reported to be temporary, avoidance, startle responses and changes in swimming speed and direction, all have an impact on commercial activities taking places in finite times (ie. seasons) in finite spaces (ie. fishing areas). Moreover, research is limited on the far-reaching, long-term effects. Behavioral changes may affect migration and/or reproductive and spawning activities as well as the exploitable biomass in an area. This can impact catch rates for years to come and thus the viability of the fishing industry. There has been minimal research conducted on impacts of seismic activity on important commercial species, including shrimp, crab, turbot, and Atlantic cod. Future studies need to include commercial catchability to substantiate concerns from harvesters in NL. Harvesters should be engaged and involved in this research.

The collaborative DFO-industry post season crab survey has undergone changes in terms of the location and number of survey stations in recent years. The survey footprint has been increased with stations shifting from densely sampled regions to cover a broader snow crab habitat range. Fixed stations will remain the same for five years while random stations will change every year. A review of the data will be conducted every year by DFO, FFAW and fish harvesters. We are aware that PGS has this data and are assuming with the merger of PGS and TGS this information will be shared between the two.

It continues to be FFAW's position that seismic work should NOT be conducted in the vicinity of survey stations until they have been sampled for the year. The post-season crab survey continues to be vital to the fishing industry as it informs decision making with regards to quotas for coming years. Our members rely on this survey to be completed each year, without interruption or potential effects from outside variables. It is understood that seismic planning around the survey stations is challenging.

The report acknowledges the importance of consultations with fishing organizations. FFAW was last engaged in introductory meetings with TGS and PGS, separately, in September regarding potential

projects. Pre-planning is imperative to minimize potential conflicts and any negative impacts on fishing activity. It has been over a year since the last seismic programs proceeded in our offshore. It is increasingly important that adequate consultations and planning occur with supporting data that is accurate and up to date.

There is an expectation that effective and regular communication will ensue with the fishing industry throughout the project lifespan so that the seismic company is kept apprised of ongoing developments within our dynamic fishing industry. We look forward to enhanced mitigation measures and more specific details to come in the Environmental Assessment.

FFAW is prepared to work cooperatively with MKI and TGS regarding the planning of seismic acquisitions to avoid interactions of seismic project activity, commercial fishing activity and science survey work.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Kind regards,

Katie Power
Energy Industry Liaison, FFAW-Unifor