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Friday, October 18, 2024

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Mr. Murphy,

Thank you for providing the Fish, Food and Allied Workers' Union (FFAW-Unifor) with the opportunity to comment on MKI's Project Description and EA Scoping document for the proposed *Newfoundland Offshore Seismic and Environmental Data Collection Program, 2025-2029*.

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.

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 and program, such that early engagement can occur, and plans can be adapted, if necessary.

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.

There is no mention within this report of the Northeast Marine Slope Refuge or other marine protection areas therefore it is not evident whether consideration has been given to exclude these areas. We question whether there will be additional mitigation measures put in place to ensure marine conservation targets are met. Marine conservation must be meaningful and consistent while acknowledging that the aforementioned 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 greatly reduced.

Canada has committed to protecting 25% of its oceans by 2025 and 30% by 2030. Current protected marine areas make up approximately 14.7%. FFAW was notified in July by DFO that processes were underway to assess the feasibility of identifying “a number of new potential marine conservation areas in the Canadian-NL offshore” by way of proposing additional Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and/or Marine Refuges. Preliminary mapping consultations are expected this fall and winter. The ocean has finite space; when we consider the cumulative impacts of offshore areas already allotted to oil and gas operators and fisheries closures by way of MPAs and Marine Refuges coupled with the dynamic nature of commercial fisheries, it's inshore fish harvesters that feel the squeeze the most. The detrimental effects of further reducing fishing grounds offshore cannot be understated.

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. While it is understood additional research was undertaken this past summer, Atlantic Canadian research on this topic is very limited. 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.

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 DFO-industry post-season crab survey is not the same as other DFO scientific surveys. We cannot support a move into an area of seismic interest that is also an open area for fishing until we have assurance that there will be no fishing activity in the area. We expect regular dialogue with the proponent to mitigate potential issues that could easily arise should there be crab gear in the water or should a harvester move to the area before the end of the extended season.

The importance of both the fishery and the post-season industry collaborative snow crab survey must be recognized across both industries.

MKI is proposing to deploy one or more Floating Lidar Systems (FLS) buoys to acquire meteorological and oceanographic data. Given the associated instrumentation is to be moored to the seafloor, timely consultation with FFAW is expected. The ocean footprint, including coordinates, safety zones, and anchor or mooring patterns must be communicated effectively to FFAW membership.

Pre-planning is imperative to minimize potential conflicts and any negative impacts on fishing activity. It is increasingly important that adequate consultations and planning occur with supporting data that is accurate and up to date.

Climate change is increasingly affecting our ocean seascapes and migration patterns of commercial fish stocks. 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.

FFAW-Unifor would like to thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on these documents. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Kind regards,



Katie Power
Industry Relations Representative