



Groundfish Enterprise Allocation Council

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April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017

Mr. Darren Hicks  
Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board  
5th Floor, TD Place  
140 Water Street  
St. John's, NL A1C 6H6

Dear Mr. Hicks:

We are submitting these comments based upon the request issued on March 13<sup>th</sup> for comments on the Polarcus UK Ltd. Eastern Newfoundland Offshore Seismic Program, 2016 to 2022 Environmental Assessment.

To begin, we note that the study area overlaps substantially with shrimp and groundfish harvesting activities undertaken by our membership. The timing of the project activities (May 1<sup>st</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>) will certainly lead to some overlap between our harvesting activities and potential seismic activity.

The fishery avoidance mitigation measures described by the document are inadequate to address our past negative experiences with the seismic exploration. The document suggests that no fisher will be required to relocate based on the exploration activities. We do not share this conclusion, especially given that we have observed substantial reduction in catch rates of both shrimp and groundfish as a result of seismic testing within the general vicinity. This means that although a seismic survey vessel may not force us to immediately relocate to avoid the survey vessel, the resultant impacts of fish distribution from the seismic pulses will cause us to significantly alter our fishing plans – even leading us to abandon some areas for several months. We request that the EA include some parameters on the avoidance of activity, to be determined through direct discussion with us. This avoidance should include both a spatial and temporal element to allow our harvesting activities to continue without reductions in catch rates.

We take special notice to the effects assessment presented in Section 5.8 of the document. The effects assessment seems limited to direct mortality or injury, and any reference to behavioral changes is only mentioned in passing. We took special interest in Figure 5-2 which suggests that a behavioral threshold from the noise assessment may extend out beyond 9 km from the acoustic energy source – this is consistent with our observations whereby species change distribution according to survey activities and will distribute themselves in a fashion

unavailable for harvest. It is our experience that this effect is large in magnitude and requires a prescribed avoidance protocol and advance planning to avoid negative impacts on our harvesting activities. This should be described in the mitigation of these perceived significant effects and be negotiated with fishing industry participants.

We suggest that there is not sufficient information in this document to adequately assess the impacts of seismic exploration on shrimp and groundfish behavior and distribution. Without this information, we must proceed in a precautionary manner that respects existing ocean users while still establish a path to allow exploration and resource development. We recommend that the CNLOPB disallow further seismic exploration programs until an agreement is reached between the regulators and industry on both sides of this issue on mitigation and further research.

We submit these comments based on our past experience with seismic exploration near our harvesting grounds. This experience has generally not been positive and we seek to improve our relationships with the oil and gas exploration industry such that the benefits of our oceans can benefit all sectors. We continue to ask that the CNLOPB increase their scrutiny of these seismic exploration programs to ensure that the interests of all harvesting sectors are respected.

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to provide our input on this important process.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Bruce Chapman  
President

Cc: CAPP Members  
GEAC Members