



## 4RST Capelin Management Recommendations for 2026

---

**March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**Attn: Erin Dunne, Senior Resource Manager – Pelagic Fisheries**

Dear 4RST Capelin Advisory Committee Members,

### ***Introduction***

Oceans North is a charitable organization that fosters science- and community-based conservation in the Arctic and Atlantic regions of Canada, as well as western Greenland. Our goal in fisheries processes in which we participate is to ensure that fish populations are rebuilt wherever possible and that they support future generations of fish harvesters while contributing to a functional marine ecosystem.

Following our participation in the 2026 4RST Capelin Advisory meeting, we are providing our management recommendations for the upcoming fishing season.

### ***Limit Reference Point***

It remains critically important that the Department establish a Limit Reference Point (LRP) for the 4RST Capelin stock. Capelin are a key forage species in the Gulf of St. Lawrence ecosystem and serve as prey for numerous commercially important fish species, including Atlantic cod, Greenland halibut, American plaice, and redfish, as well as seabirds and marine mammals.

Despite their ecological importance, the stock continues to be characterized by considerable uncertainty and lacks formal reference points to guide management. This situation creates a risk of entering an “LRP limbo,” where management decisions are made without clear biological thresholds.

We therefore reiterate our recommendation that the Department prioritize the development and adoption of a Limit Reference Point for the 4RST Capelin stock. In addition, work should begin toward the establishment of an Upper Stock Reference (USR) and associated Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) that would guide management decisions in response to changes in stock status.

### ***Total Allowable Catch***

Given the continued uncertainty surrounding the status of the 4RST Capelin stock and its important ecological role, Oceans North continues to recommend a precautionary Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of **no more than 9,295 tonnes** for the 2026 fishing season.

This TAC level reflects catch levels observed between 2018 and 2021 and follows a precautionary management approach while still providing economic opportunities for harvesters. Recent years have also seen relatively low utilization of the TAC, indicating that a TAC of this level would not unnecessarily constrain the fishery.

### ***Climate Change Considerations***

Ocean temperatures in the Gulf of St. Lawrence have continued to increase in recent years, posing potential risks to capelin spawning success and overall productivity. Climate-driven changes in marine ecosystems may alter capelin distribution, recruitment, and the availability of spawning habitat.

We recommend that the Department increase survey sampling and environmental monitoring around capelin spawning habitats to better understand how warming ocean conditions may impact the stock. In other regions, including the 2J3KL capelin stock, both deep-water spawning sites and beach spawning areas are monitored to provide insights into environmental influences on capelin productivity. Expanding similar monitoring efforts for the 4RST stock would strengthen the scientific basis for management decisions.

### ***Conclusion***

Capelin play a foundational role in the Gulf of St. Lawrence ecosystem and support many commercially important species. Given the continued uncertainty surrounding stock status, a precautionary approach to management remains essential. Establishing reference points and strengthening environmental monitoring should be treated as priorities to ensure the long-term sustainability of this important forage species.

Sincerely,

Gemma Rayner  
Fisheries and Special Projects Advisor  
Oceans North