



March 10, 2026

Recommendations on Atlantic Mackerel Management for 2026

Tood Williams

Chair of the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee (AMAC)

Dear Todd,

Oceans North works to achieve a healthy ocean that supports vibrant coastal communities. Our goal in all the fisheries processes we participate in is to ensure that depleted populations are rebuilt wherever possible and that they support future generations of fishers while contributing to a functional, healthy marine ecosystem. We must stay on course to rebuild mackerel as a rebuilt stock can benefit commercial harvesters and coastal communities.

To achieve this, and in line with the 2025 science advice, the 2026 science update, the mackerel rebuilding plan, and the fisheries rebuilding regulations, **the two-year decision by Minister Thompson must be maintained for 2026: annual TAC of 500 tonnes, including 440 tonnes for personal-use bait fishery, and a continued closure of the commercial fishery.** According to the Ministerial decision last year, this aligns with science advice to support stock growth while allowing harvesters to catch their own bait, which is important for communities across Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

We recognize that there are many considerations in fisheries management decisions, including those articulated in Section 2.5 of the *Fisheries Act*. This letter reiterates our support for decisions that will grow commercial stocks out of the critical zone. As mackerel are an important forage fish species, supporting many species in the North Atlantic, even more diligence and commitment need to be placed on its rebuilding.

Below is further rationale to support maintaining the Minister's 2025 and 2026 decision.

Most Recent Science Advice (2025 Assessment and 2026 Update)

The 2025 stock assessment and 2026 science update show that the Atlantic mackerel population remains deep in the critical zone (below the limit reference point (LRP), where it has been at or near since 2011. The spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2023 and 2024 were at 32% and 35% of the LRP, respectively. By its very definition, the critical zone is where serious harm could be occurring to the stock. There have still been no signs of substantial

recruitment events since 2015, and recent average recruitment is only at 26% of levels estimated before the stock collapse (1969-2010).

The projections from the 2025 assessment show that the probability of growth, i.e., that the SSB in 2027 will be greater than 2025 is 81% (78-84%) at a TAC of 0 (considering bycatch, recreational removals and estimated U.S. catch) and 75% at a TAC of 500 tonnes. Any removals above this level showed less than a 75% chance of growth, which contrasts with the primary goal of the rebuilding plan.

Mackerel Rebuilding Plan

The mackerel rebuilding plan was created out of a multi-stakeholder forum consisting of harvesters, Indigenous representatives, science, management, and ENGOs over the course of several years, guided by the fish stocks provisions. Many representatives of the rebuilding plan working group, including indigenous and non-Indigenous harvesters, noted during the formation of the plan concerns about the state of the mackerel stock. We understand that there are more observations of mackerel abundance from harvesters today and we encourage DFO to continue to work with harvesters on sampling programs.

The rebuilding plan was reviewed by the rebuilding plan working group pursuant to Fishery (General) Regulations section 70(1) in late 2025. The review revealed that, “the Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding Plan is progressing on its rebuilding objectives and remains in effect with no adjustments to the Plan needed” (MARMAC PPT February 13, 2026).

Socio-economic Importance of Rebuilding

While not a primary consideration for stocks in the critical zone, we want to highlight the socio-economic importance of rebuilding as we know it is significant for coastal communities and harvesters. In 2020, Oceans North hired a highly regarded economic group, Gardner-Pinfold Consulting, to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of rebuilding the mackerel stock using the [results](#) of the management strategy evaluation (MSE) completed in 2019. The study revealed that rebuilding the mackerel stock could lead to benefits estimated at over \$54 million, with a 12.9% return on the “investment” in stock rebuilding.

Ecological Importance of Rebuilding

As a forage fish, Atlantic mackerel provide ecosystem services in addition to their contribution to biodiversity. They are prey for whales and seabirds, as well commercially important species such as bluefin tuna. They also help to move energy up the food chain by eating plankton during early stages of their lifecycles. Additionally, [emerging studies](#) are revealing the role that forage fish play in storing carbon in the deep ocean. In line with Canada’s commitment to the Global Biodiversity Framework and specific targets within Canada’s 2030 Nature Strategy, there is ample evidence to support mackerel rebuilding for its foundational ecological role.

Monitoring and E-logs

We support additional actions to address the monitoring shortcomings highlighted in the Fisheries Monitoring Policy assessment for mackerel and the [2023 report](#) of the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development. We support the recommendation for the voluntary use of e-logs this year. We also flag concerns that the minimum level of dockside monitoring established for the bait fishery has not been met.

We support the recreational fishery as an important source of food security for coastal communities but also support a new survey on recreational harvest to improve data collection and understanding of those removals.

Coordination with the U.S.

We account for U.S. removals in our assessment and for the last number of years, the removals of northern contingent mackerel between the two countries have been relatively similar. Recent decisions to increase the U.S. TAC reflect an increase in the Southern contingent, fish that do not enter Canadian waters. Every effort should be made to maintain coordination with the U.S. on mackerel in line with the FOPO recommendations and Canada should continue to display continued strong leadership on stock rebuilding by sticking to our plan.

Conclusion

To ensure a healthy mackerel fishery in the future, the current science is clear, as are the socio-economic and environmental benefits of rebuilding. **We support following through on the two-year decision that the Minister made last year to allow a TAC of 500 tonnes.**

We understand that a new assessment will take place in the coming months, so we reserve any new or different recommendations until we see those results.

Sincerely,

Katie Schleit
Fisheries Director, Oceans North