



“We’re confident that cod is going to be part of the livelihoods of harvesters and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador for a long time.”

—Keith Sullivan, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union

July 1992

The federal government closes the 2J3KL northern cod fishery in Newfoundland

February 1997

WWF and Unilever establish the MSC

April 2015

WWF and the FFAW-Unifor launch the 2J3KL Northern Cod Fisheries Improvement Project

May 2015

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Stock Status Update reports continued increasing trends, indicating improvement in overall stock status of the 2J3KL fishery

2020

The 2J3KL northern cod fishery meets MSC’s sustainability standards and enters a full assessment

RESURRECTING THE NORTHERN COD FISHERY

In 1992, federal Fisheries Minister John Crosbie closed the northern cod fishery; the species that sustained Newfoundland for 500 years had been overfished to near-extinction.

So when WWF teamed up with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW–Unifor) this spring to bring the northern cod fishery up to the strict sustainability standards of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the project turned heads.

Can we really resurrect northern cod to the point it can be fished sustainably? Janice Ryan, WWF’s senior specialist, fisheries conservation, believes so. This spring’s survey showed another increase in the spawning stock. “We’re seeing cod of different ages throughout their stock area, all in good physical health,” she says, “as well as large numbers of the capelin that cod feed on.”

We also have a successful track record to draw on. The WWF-led Fisheries Improvement Project for a smaller Newfoundland cod stock—3Ps cod—applied for MSC certification in 2014.

There’s plenty of work ahead: identifying the stakeholders and partners who will need to be involved, assessing the issues of concern, developing an action plan to bring the fishery up to MSC standards, and then putting that plan to work. The biggest challenges, says Janice, will be setting sustainable targets and strict harvest control rules.

“There’s going to be a lot of scrutiny. There’s going to be a lot of skepticism,” she acknowledges. “But with the right measures in place, this fishery will once again support coastal communities.

“Our main goal is to improve this northern cod stock, to bring it back to healthy, robust levels so it can provide sustainable livelihoods for the communities that depend on it the most,” says Janice.

Keith Sullivan: Sustaining livelihoods for generations to come

As a kid growing up in a fishing family, Keith Sullivan felt the impact of the 1992 cod moratorium first-hand. Now, as president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, he’s excited to be launching a fisheries improvement project designed to help the 2J3KL cod fishery make a comeback.

After many years of sacrifice from commercial harvesters, cod stocks have grown dramatically. With the right information and the right management, plus some help from WWF, Keith believes the northern cod will become a viable and sustainable fishery.

“We really can’t afford to make mistakes like we did in the past,” he says. “We want to assure everybody in the world who is going to be buying our fish that we are doing it sustainably now.”



(left to right)
David Miller,
Rocket Bakery
co-owner
Kelly Mansell,
and FFAW-
Unifor president
Keith Sullivan
in St. John’s,
in July 2015.