MECTS # 2003-009-02000

BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE MINISTER

MEETING WITH CAPE BRETON OYSTER FISHERY INTERESTS TO DISCUSS CONCERNS ABOUT THE FISHERY AND MSX MANAGEMENT

(Information Only)

SUMMARY

- You are meeting oyster growers from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, in Sydney on October 14th, 2003. They are likely to raise concerns over oyster fishery closures since 2002, conditions on harvesting for aquaculture lease-holders, stringent control of oyster movements to outside the Bras d'Or Lakes area of Cape Breton and related financial losses due to MSX.

- The oyster fishery was closed in 2002 for conservation purposes *prior* to detection of MSX disease. When MSX disease was confirmed (October 2003) the only oyster harvesting was off leases and the First Nations food fishery.
  - First Nations Chiefs voluntarily closed their food fishery
  – Leases were closed under a variation order in early November 2002, and harvesting permitted solely through stringent guidelines requiring lease-holders and processors to guarantee no relay or re-washing off site. These restrictions are still in place, but were modified in early 2003 to permit marketing east of Quebec city.

- An intense surveillance program was conducted by DFO's Shellfish Health Unit (Gulf Region) in collaboration with Maritimes Region personnel, the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and First Nations (Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources – whose experimental oyster farm was impacted) and local lease-holders. Results up to June 2003, show MSX to be restricted to Bras d'Or Lakes, Cape Breton.

- Control options were presented to all stakeholders in August and September (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) and feedback noted. These control options focus on control of oyster movements out of Bras d'Or Lakes to prevent spread of the disease to vulnerable populations in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Issue

- MSX is a notifiable disease of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE – the World Organisation for Animal Health) based on its ability to cause rapid mass mortalities in American oysters. Its discovery in dying oysters in Cape Breton in October 2002, poses a significant threat to oyster production throughout Atlantic Canada.

- A related parasite detected during MSX surveillance activities knows as SSO does not appear to be a significant threat to oysters health.

- Control of MSX disease is extremely difficult and the disease has spread from Delaware Bay to most other oyster areas along the eastern US. The existence of an unknown 'carrier' or intermediate host of the MSX parasite means removal of infected oysters may be of little use for eradicating the disease agent. Most efforts, thus, concentrate on control of movements of infected oysters which could spread the disease to unaffected areas.

- The source of MSX has not been established, but infections show a point source within St. Patrick's Channel. Shipping traffic is the suspected, but unproven, source of the introduction to Bras d'Or Lakes. If the case, fresh infectious material will be repeatedly introduced into Cape Breton waters, as such shipping activities continue.

CURRENT STATUS

- DFO has established an Atlantic Shellfish Health Technical Advisory Committee (ASHTAC), comprised of molluscan disease control experts from Canada and the USA, to provide recommendations for MSX control.

- An emergency surveillance program undertaken to delineate MSX in Atlantic Canadian oysters was completed in May 2003. and shows the disease to be limited to Bras d'Or Lakes oysters.

- Six disease-control recommendations presented to industry and provinces are:
  a) Removal of all oysters from infected sites is <u>not</u> considered to be feasible for eradicating MSX from Cape Breton waters.
  b) Bras d'Or Lakes should be zoned as MSX-positive, despite some sites remaining MSX-negative from surveillance to date. Thus, no live oysters, shells, or shell material should be permitted to move out of Bras d'Or Lakes.
  c) Movement of oysters, or oyster shell, within Bras d'Or Lakes would be acceptable, where positive-to-positive and negative-to-negative transfers are feasible.
  d) Movements of oysters onto positive sites in order to accelerate development of a disease resistance is <u>not</u> recommended, as this may increase pathogen loading and potential for accelerated spread via unknown carrier hosts.

e) SSO infections appear light and widely distributed throughout Gulf oyster populations, thus, control of this infection may be unnecessary, and unfeasible.

f) There is no evidence to suggest species other than oysters pose a significant threat for movement of MSX, thus, control efforts should focus on oysters. However, stringent removal of any oyster hitch-hikers will be required for mass transfers of other species from MSX-positive.

- These recommendations were presented to provincial fisheries departments and DFO fisheries management for discussion on May 30, 2003. They were also discussed at two meetings of the Eastern Nova Scotia Oyster Management Board in August and September.

SPEAKING POINTS FOR THE MINISTER

- **DFO implemented stringent controls on all shellfish harvesting activities in Cape Breton on detection of MSX disease in October, 2002. These controls were aimed at limiting inadvertent spread of the disease while federal and provincial personnel undertook an intense surveillance program to establish the extent of the infection throughout Atlantic Canada.**

- **Results were used to revise the emergency control measures in spring 2003 and devise appropriate control options for discussion with stakeholders.**

- **Results indicate MSX is still limited to Bras d'Or Lakes. Thus all efforts by the Department are aimed at containment within the Lakes and assessment of options for developing disease resistant oyster stock from any survivors.**

- **The extreme cold and long duration of ice on Bras d'Or Lakes appears to have adversely impacted MSX, since outbreaks this year do not appear as pronounced as in 2002. However, DFO is maintaining close monitoring in partnership with the Province and industry to ensure any mortalities are quickly investigated. DFO Shellfish Health experts are in Cape Breton this week collecting more samples.**

- **DFO is working with international expertise in MSX disease control to ensure that all options for control of the disease in Cape Breton are based on up-to-date scientific knowledge. All options are also developed is close collaboration with Fisheries Management, the Area Office in Sydney, and through discussions with all stakeholders.**

Government of Canada
Fisheries and Oceans

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Pêches et Océans

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To: / À : Robert G. Thibault

Date :

Subject: / Objet : **MEETING WITH CAPE BRETON OYSTER FISHERY INTERESTS TO DISCUSS CONCERNS ABOUT THE FISHERY AND MSX MANAGEMENT**

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