



## CUSK

## [Submit Your Comments Here](#)

The Government of Canada is consulting with Canadians on whether **Cusk** should be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as an **endangered** species. – Please fill out online [survey](#) by March 18, 2016

### Your opinion counts!

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) supports Canada's international commitments to conserve biological diversity by providing legal protection for wildlife species at risk. SARA acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether Cusk (*Brosme brosme*) will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA, we would like to receive your comments regarding the possible ecological, cultural, and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species.

### Adding a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk

The first step in the process to determine if a species should be listed under SARA occurs when the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), an independent committee of experts, assesses the status of a species based on the best available information, including scientific data, local ecological information and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. COSEWIC then assigns the species a designation based on its risk of disappearing in Canada (e.g. endangered, threatened, special concern).

Once the species has been assessed, the Government of Canada must then decide whether or not to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA. Public consultations are an important step in the process to gather information on the potential positive and negative impacts of protecting a species under SARA.

### Facts about Cusk

Cusk are a slow-swimming, deep water (200 m – 375 m most commonly) marine fish species with a large head, wide mouth and an elongated body. They have several rows of sharp teeth and a single barbel—or whisker—on the lower jaw. Body colouring varies from reddish to greenish-brown, fading to cream or white on the belly (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Cusk.

In Canadian waters, Cusk are found off the Atlantic coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. They are most commonly found in the Gulf of Maine, the Western Scotian Shelf, and along the edge of the Scotian Shelf to Banquereau Bank (Figure 2). They are rarely seen in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Spawning usually occurs from May to August on the Scotian Shelf, but may be as early as April in the Gulf of Maine. Females are thought to lay a minimum of 100,000 eggs at a time. Their diet consists of marine invertebrates, such as crab, shrimp and krill, and occasionally other fish.

### Status designation of Cusk in Canadian waters

COSEWIC assessed the Cusk population in Canadian waters in November 2012 and assigned it a status of endangered. Under SARA, an endangered species is defined as one that is facing imminent extirpation (the species no longer exists in the wild in Canada) or extinction (the species no longer exists in the wild anywhere).

### Why is Cusk assessed as at risk?

According to COSEWIC, the mature portion of the population in Canadian waters declined by approximately 85% over three generations. Overfishing is the most important threat to Cusk. There is no directed commercial or recreational fishery for Cusk in Canadian waters, but the species is caught as bycatch in several fisheries in Atlantic Canada, including groundfish and lobster. The groundfish longline and lobster trap fisheries in the area of highest Cusk abundance (off the southwest coast of Nova Scotia in Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization Divisions 4X and 5Z) have been



# Aquatic Species at Risk



identified as having the highest levels of Cusk bycatch. Cusk may also be caught as part of the Aboriginal food, social and ceremonial (FSC) fishery in Nova Scotia. As a deep-water species, Cusk typically experience significant injuries caused by the change in pressure when they are brought to the surface, and therefore post-release mortality rates are very high (likely over 90%).

## What happens if Cusk is listed under the *Species at Risk Act*?

If Cusk is listed as endangered, the prohibitions of SARA would immediately come into effect in Canadian waters. It would be illegal to kill, harm, harass, capture, possess, buy, sell, or trade Cusk. A recovery strategy and subsequent action plan(s) would be developed to identify measures to address known threats. Critical habitat – the habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of Cusk – would need to be identified, to the extent possible, in a recovery strategy or action plan and protected from destruction.

## How would listing under SARA benefit Cusk?

The prohibitions implemented under SARA would offer legal protection for the species in Canada and would trigger recovery planning in collaboration with key partners. There may be increased access to funding for scientific research and stewardship activities aimed at recovering the species.

## How would listing impact fishing activities?

### Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Fishing activities with the potential to catch Cusk as bycatch would be reviewed to determine whether they qualify for a SARA permit or exemption. If a permit or exemption is issued, a fishery could continue to operate, but Cusk caught as bycatch must be returned to the water in the manner that causes the least harm. Other measures could be implemented such as increased observer coverage and/or spatial closures.

### Aboriginal Fisheries

Licensed fisheries for Cusk for FSC purposes could be issued an exemption if it is determined that such a fishery is not a threat to the survival and recovery of the population. An exemption would need to be included in a finalized recovery strategy.

Your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding Cusk as endangered to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA would be appreciated.

Your comments are important.

Please fill out a [survey](#): we want to hear from you.

A copy of the 2012 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report and other information can be found on the SARA Registry at [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca) and the Recovery Potential Assessment for Cusk in Canadian Waters can be found at <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/>.

Thank you for completing this [survey](#).

**Species at Risk Program, Maritimes Region**  
1 Challenger Drive, PO Box 1006  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2Y 4A2

[xmarsara@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:xmarsara@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

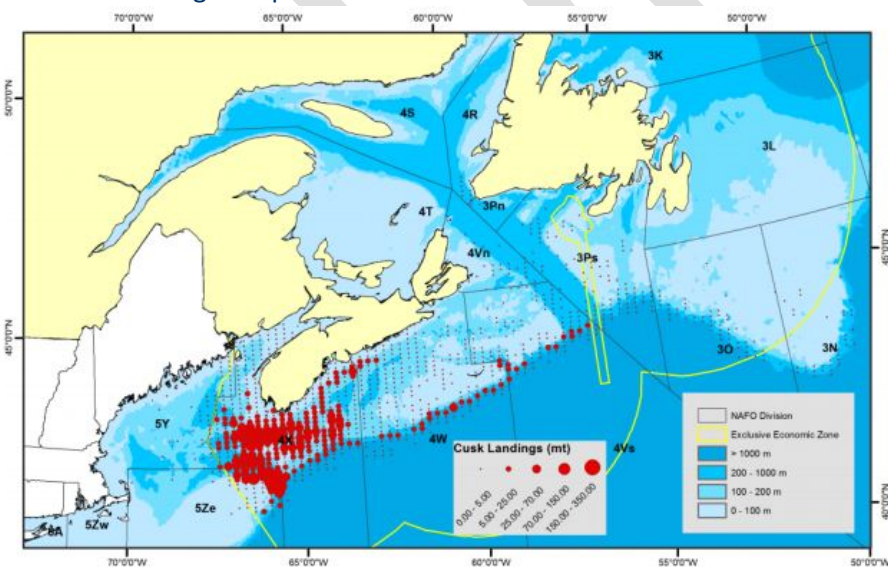


Figure 2. Magnitude and distribution of Cusk landings between 2002 and 2013 overlaid on Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and Canadian Exclusive Economic Zone boundaries.



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