

# Response Statement - Cusk

**December 18, 2013**

**Common Name:** Cusk

**Scientific Name:** *Brosme brosme*

**Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC):** Endangered

**How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment:** The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Cusk should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Endangered. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Cusk to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

**Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC:** This species is a large, slow-growing, bottom-living fish that resides in the Gulf of Maine and Scotian Shelf, and which has been declining continuously since 1970. The mature portion of the population has declined by approximately 85% over three generations. There is also strong evidence that its area of occupancy has declined considerably. Average fish size has also declined, consistent with a decline in abundance. Limited management efforts have not been effective in halting the decline.

**Occurrence:** Atlantic Ocean

**Competent Minister(s):**

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

**Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:**

Newfoundland and Labrador

New Brunswick

Nova Scotia

**Applicable federal legislation:** Fisheries are managed and fish habitat is protected under the *Fisheries Act*.

**Conservation activities underway:** There is currently no directed commercial fishery for Cusk, although it is landed as by-catch in the groundfish fishery. Since the previous COSEWIC assessment of this species, the by-catch cap for Cusk has been lowered to 650t. Once this by-catch cap has been reached, any Cusk caught must be returned to the water (discarded). Groundfish fishery logbooks have been amended to include a column for discards, which will improve reporting of discarded Cusk. An analysis of bycatch data is underway to assess the conservation risks associated with levels of discards; however, in recent years, catches of Cusk have not exceeded the by-catch cap. An abundance index for Cusk was developed in 2012. Using this index, a limit reference point was established, which represents the stock status below which serious harm is occurring to the stock. Cusk is currently believed to be above this limit reference point, likely in the cautious zone under the Precautionary Approach to fisheries management. DFO is currently developing a species distribution model for Cusk, which will allow for a better understanding of the habitat attributes that influence Cusk distribution. This information will better inform decisions related to Cusk conservation and management. DFO Science is also working on validating results from previous work using bomb radiocarbon dating as a methodology for determining the age of Cusk.