



Fishery moves further down the food-chain

DFO may be shooting themselves in the foot with their proposed krill fishery

BY CHRIS MILLER

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans may sink to a new level — a new trophic level that is.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is currently examining the feasibility of allowing krill to be fished off the coast of Nova Scotia. This has angered many fishers, scientists and environmentalists who say that a healthy krill population is essential to the recovery of the collapsed east coast groundfishery and for sustaining dwindling whale populations.

Krill, a tiny shrimp-like marine animal, is important because it is located near the base of the food chain. This means that all animals higher up on the food chain, such as cod, bluefin tuna and whales are directly or indirectly dependent upon the health of the krill population.

Environmentalists fear that "fishing down" the food chain, as is proposed through the creation of the krill fishery, will further damage the ecological integrity of already stressed marine ecosystems. Others object to the purpose of harvesting krill, which in other areas of the world has been used for fertilizer and as feed for

the aquaculture industry.

Conservation biologist Dr. Martin Willison of Dalhousie University is concerned about the establishment of a krill fishery in Atlantic Canada.

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"It is another example of us moving down the food chain, and that is a very dangerous thing," says Willison. "We don't yet know enough about the impacts of such an activity. If we continue down the current path, we'll eventually be eating plankton; that's all that will be left."

In the DFO's krill *Stock Status Report*, it was concluded there is little information available on krill populations.

"There is much that is unknown on the status of krill on the Scotian Shelf, and on the impact of harvesting this species on the overall ecosystem," the report says.

Despite a lack of available data, however, the same DFO report concludes there will be no negative effects associated with the implementation of the experimental krill fishery.

"Given the small portion of the [krill] biomass that would be removed, it is concluded that the impacts on the ecosystem would be

negligible," said the report.

Alexa McDonough, leader of the federal NDP party, has taken a position against the proposed krill fishery.

"It's the NDP's position that this proposal, by allowing fishing further down the lower part of the food chain, will lead to a wholesale collapse of marine ecosystems with disastrous results for the long-term sustainability of the larger species fishery," McDonough said via e-mail.

Many local fishermen are also sceptical. The Bay of Fundy Fisheries Council has called on the minister of the DFO to reject the krill harvesting proposal.

According to Odette Murphy, Fisheries Advisor for the DFO, over 95 per cent of public submissions made to the department were against the krill proposal and many of these submissions came directly from fishers.

"[The public response] was overwhelmingly opposed to it," says Murphy.

The Marine Issues Committee of the Ecology Action Centre is one of the groups that has voiced

concerns over the krill fishery. They caution that removing this species from the ocean may impede the recovery of the collapsed east coast groundfishery, which has devastated coastal communities in

concerns over right whale populations have been addressed by DFO, but the two are not really in conflict with each other.

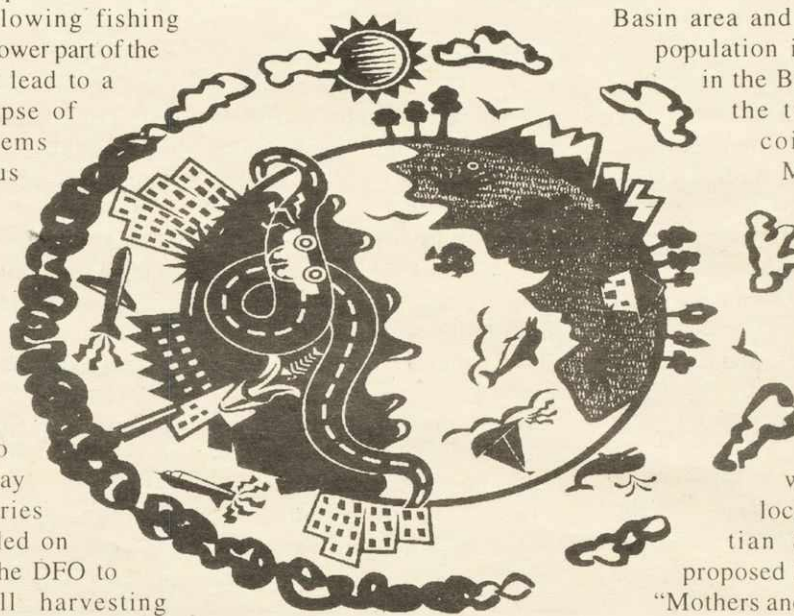
"The proposal in question is for the Scotian Shelf/ Emerald Basin area and the right whale population is predominately in the Bay of Fundy...so the two areas don't coincide," says Murphy. "There is a lot of reporting that has gone on about [the right whales] that is in error."

Dr. Willison disagrees, stating that whales are located on the Scotian Shelf near the proposed krill fishery.

"Mothers and suckling young gather in the Bay of Fundy, yet juvenile right whales congregate in the Roseway Basin on the Scotian Shelf. Why would there be a whale sanctuary there if there were no whales?," asks Willison, referring to the Roseway Basin Whale Sanctuary.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is currently reviewing the krill proposal and a decision to approve or reject the application is expected by the end of the month.

According to Murphy,



Atlantic Canada since the early 1990s.

The Marine Issues Committee is also concerned that fishing krill will put humans in direct competition with endangered right whales, who depend upon the tiny organism as part of their food supply. The current world population of North Atlantic right whales has dropped to 350, most of which gather off the coast of Nova Scotia in the summer.

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