



CORALS AND SPONGES

A key component of marine ecosystems to be conserved

Small sea pen (*Pennatulula grandis*)



Consultation for the establishment of conservation measures

Background paper for the consultation on the establishment of conservation measures for the St. Lawrence corals and sponges

2016-2017

Your comments are important!

We hope to see you at a consultation session.

CONSULTATION

Who is involved?

Do you fish with a trawl, a semi-pelagic trawl, a trap, a gillnet, a longline or a dredge? This consultation is for you.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) would like to obtain your comments to help it target areas to be protected while minimizing the economic impact on the fisheries.

The information collected during the consultations, together with the economic and ecological data, will help DFO make informed decisions when putting in place conservation measures.



To consult the Strategy:
<http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/publications/cs-ce/page01-eng.html>



WHY

protect corals and sponges?

Corals and sponges play an important role in maintaining the health of the ecosystems in which they live. They provide species of commercial significance and other marine species with a place where they can reproduce, feed and protect themselves. However, their slow growth and low mobility make them vulnerable.

Conservation of corals and sponges contributes to sustainable fishery management. With a growing interest for ecocertification and demands of the international market for sustainable fisheries, the protection of corals and sponges is an asset for the fishing industry of Eastern Canada.

Which corals and sponges live in the St. Lawrence?



Sea pens are a variety of soft coral. Their highest concentration in Canada can be found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Four species can be found there: two *large sea pens*, which can measure up to 1.25 m, and two *small sea pens* measuring about 40 cm. They live on soft bottoms at depths of over 100 m.

On the left: large sea pen (*Anthoptilum grandiflorum*), on the right: small sea pen (*Pennatula grandis*)

There are also three other species of **soft coral**: sea broccoli, sea cauliflower and sea strawberry. They attach themselves to hard substrates at depths of 35 m and more.

On the left: sea broccoli (*Duva florida*), on the right: sea strawberry (*Gersemia rubiformis*)



There is only one species of **hard coral**: *Flabellum alabastrum*. This small organism (up to 8 cm) lives on soft bottoms at depths of over 200 m.

The St. Lawrence is also home to numerous species of **sponges**, which are difficult to differentiate from each other. We therefore consider them as one single group. They attach themselves to a variety of bottoms ranging from mud to rock outcrops and can be found at all depths.



Potential impacts of fishing gears

The use of bottom-contact fishing gears may harm or destroy corals and sponges. Individuals can become caught, entangled, or crushed in the gear. The redistribution of sediment can smother the corals and sponges which affects the feeding processes.

DFO classifies fishing gears according to the extent of their impact on the ecosystem. Ratings range from 1 for those with the lowest impact to 4 for those with the greatest impact.

Rating	Examples of gear
1	Harpoons, diving
2	Pelagic longlines, purse nets
3	Traps, gillnets, longlines
4	Trawls, dredges

What conservation measures are under consideration?

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is looking into the possibility of implementing measures to limit the use of bottom-contact fishing gears in some areas of the St. Lawrence Estuary and Gulf.

Which gears may be affected?

All bottom-contact fishing gears are being assessed. For instance:

- Trawls
- Semi-pelagic trawls
- Traps
- Dredges
- Gillnets
- Longlines
- Bottom seines

Let's act now to protect the marine ecosystems of the St. Lawrence.

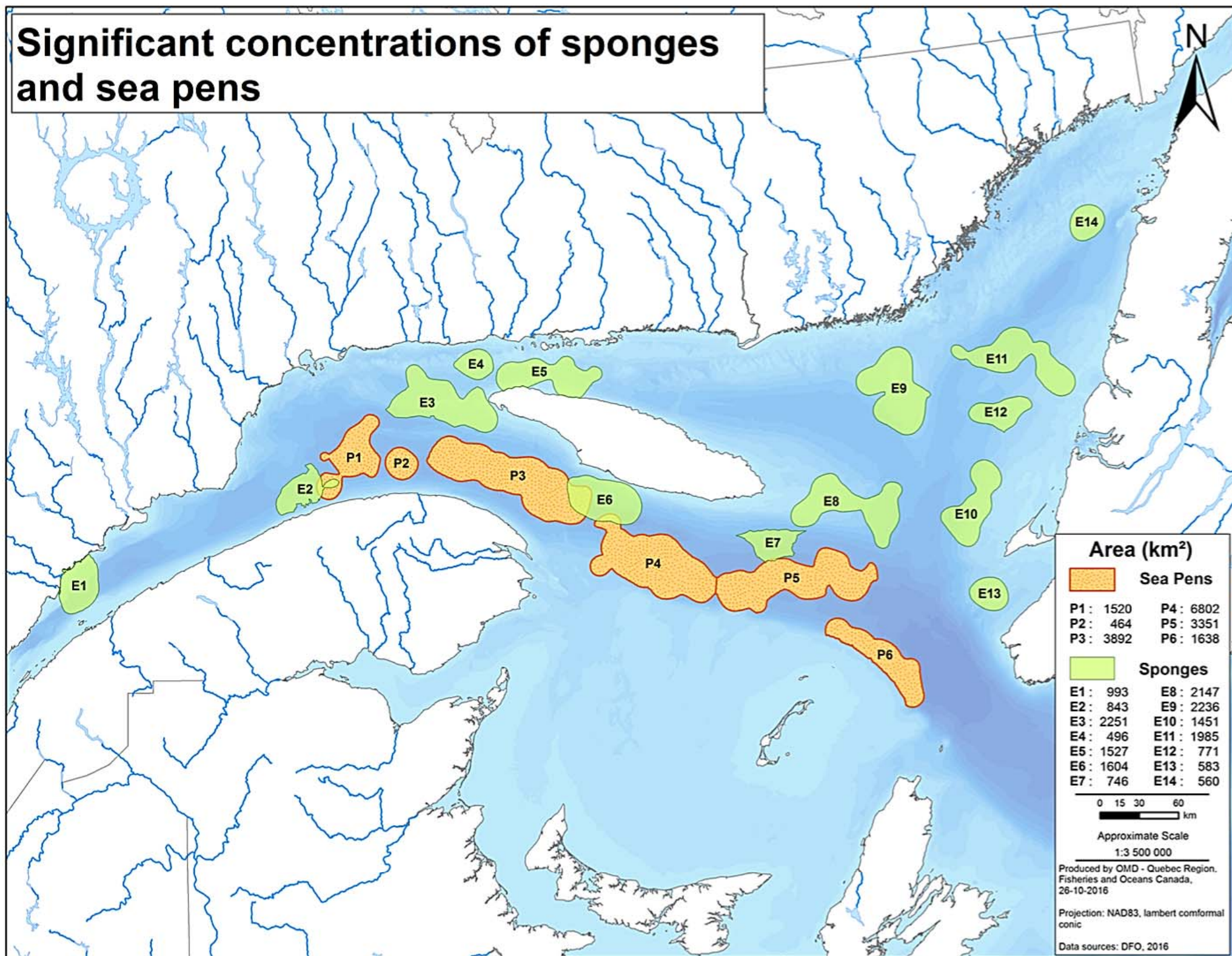
Because corals and sponges are so vulnerable and slow-growing, it is vital to protect the areas we wish to conserve for the future right away.

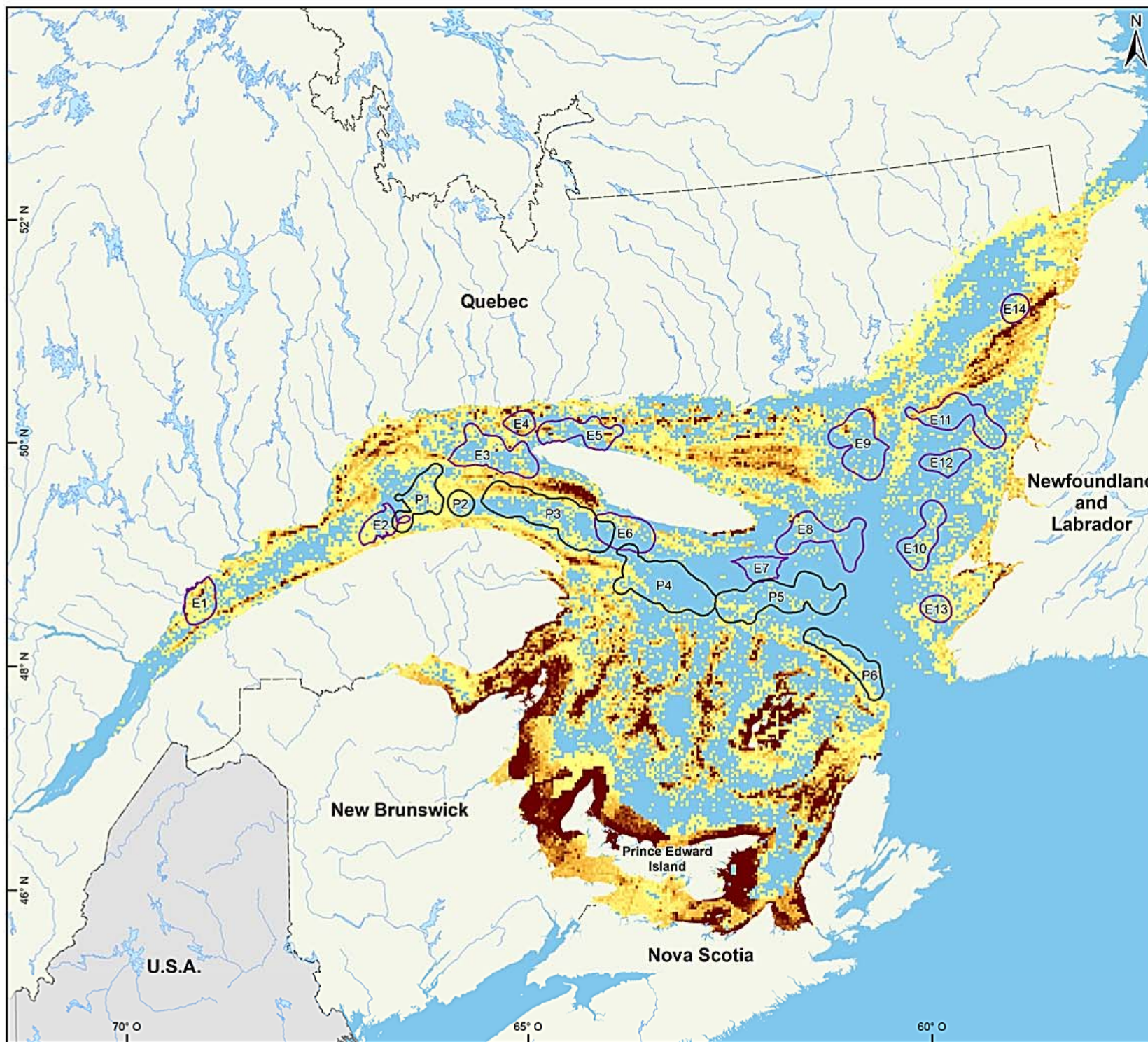
Areas chosen for coral and sponge conservation will be included in the *Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network for the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence Bioregion*, which is currently at the planning stage.

Coral and sponge conservation will contribute to meet Canada's commitments to:

- Increase the amount of its marine and coastal areas that are protected to 5% by 2017 and 10% by 2020;
- Protect vulnerable marine ecosystems according to the United Nations Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries.

Significant concentrations of sponges and sea pens



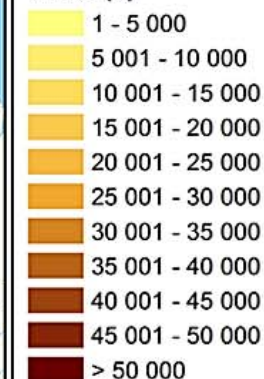


Fishing with bottom gears ⁽¹⁾ 2008-2012

Georeferenced and
estimated values

Legend

Average annual landed
value (\$) ⁽²⁾



Sea pens
Sponges

⁽¹⁾ Clam, whelk, sea cucumber, toad crab, atlantic rock crab, snow crab, shrimp, atlantic halibut (fixed), Greenland halibut (fixed), atlantic herring (fixed), American lobster, atlantic mackerel (fixed), atlantic cod (fixed), sea scallop, Iceland scallop, winter flounder (fixed and mobile), other flatfish (fixed et mobile), lumpfish roe and redfish (mobile).

⁽²⁾ Average annual landings per planning unit (2.5 km² cells).

0 20 40 80
km

Approximate Scale

1:5 000 000

Produced by OMD - Quebec Region, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2016-11-15

Projection: NAD83, lambert conformal conic

Data sources:
DFO, 2014

We would like your perspective.

During the consultation, we will show you profiles of the fisheries in these areas. We would like to verify whether the fishing activities presented in these profiles still correspond to the actual situation.

We want to hear what you have to say about the possible impacts of implementing conservation measures in areas of significance for corals and sponges.

Your comments will enable us to select areas to be conserved and adjust their boundaries in order to meet conservation targets while minimizing impacts on the fisheries.



If you cannot come to the consultation

We invite you to complete the questionnaire enclosed with this mailing and return it to us or send us your comments in the format of your choice to GP-FM-Quebec@dfo-mpo.gc.ca by February 28, 2017.

Timeline

Fall 2016 – Winter 2017	Consultation with Aboriginal groups and harvester organizations concerned
	Mailing of the meeting reports to the groups consulted
Fall 2017	Proposition of conservation measures developed based on analysis of the comments received during the consultation
	Reception of the comments on the proposed measures from the groups concerned
December 2017	Announcement of the measures to be implemented at the beginning of the 2018 fishing season

To contact us:

Would you like to advise us of your concerns, ask questions or obtain information before the consultations? Write to us at GP-FM-Quebec@dfo-mpo.gc.ca, indicating “Coral/Sponge Consultations” on the subject line of the message.