

RESEARCH

Seeking the heart and soul of northern cod

Scientists head out on month-long survey of stocks, ecosystem research

BY GLEN WHIFFEN
THE TELEGRAM

Sometime this month George Rose hopes to get a look at the Hamilton Bank off the southeastern coast of Labrador.

That's where he believes the heart and soul of the northern cod stock lies.

Rose, director of the Marine Institute's Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research, left St. John's Tuesday along with a team of scientists aboard the research vessel RV Celtic Explorer for a month of fisheries surveys and research along the province's northeast coast.



It's the fifth year the 65.5-metre Celtic Explorer has been leased by the province for the research. The Celtic Explorer is based at the Irish Marine Institute in Galway, Ireland, and is fitted with the latest electronics and scientific equipment to support fisheries research.

"I think this year we are expecting a major survey that can take us, we hope, as far north as Hamilton Bank," Rose said.

He noted weather and ice conditions prevented the vessel from getting that far in previous years.

"This is the area that was the heart and soul of the northern cod stock for hundreds of years, and I always considered it was kind of the engine that drove the whole thing," he said. "And it went down really quickly about 25 years ago and I expect there is some evidence it is starting to rebuild."

Premier Paul Davis, Fisheries Minister Vaughn Granter and vice-president of Memorial University of Newfoundland (Marine Institute) Glenn Blackwood were among dignitaries touring the ship in St. John's harbour before it left Tuesday.

"Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in the country to solely fund its own offshore fisheries research," Davis said.

"The relationship between leading-edge science and long-term success in resource-based industries is clear. Our government continues to invest in science that will inform future decision-making and support the future sustainability of the fishery."

In last week's provincial budget, the government provided \$2.6 million to support world-class fisheries science initiatives at



KEITH GOSSE/THE TELEGRAM

Crew members work on some of the nets used to collect fish samples during a tour of the Celtic Explorer Tuesday.

the Marine Institute's Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research — part of more than \$15 million provided since 2010.

This is the last year of a five-year contract for lease of the Celtic Explorer.

Davis said he's hopeful another contract can be struck to lease the ship, but those discussions have yet to be held.

Following the survey last year, Rose said, they found evidence of young cod in areas

of the Grand Banks where they haven't been seen in any quantity for years. Ocean temperatures and water conditions were also improving to favouring cod rebuilding.

"I think everybody knows there have been tremendous changes, particularly in all of the fish that are of commercial interest. The crustaceans are suffering a little, they are going down, certainly not at the levels they were 10 years ago, and on the other hand, the finfish are coming up and these things are happening at the same time," Rose said.

"Over the past five years the work we've

done on this boat has been instrumental in showing that and in measuring that and bringing it forth to the public."

The RV Celtic Explorer has the latest ocean-mapping technologies, dry and wet laboratory spaces, remote-operated-vehicle capability and echo sounders for acoustic surveying.

The vessel has been chartered for one month in each of the past five years to support the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research fisheries science activities.

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Fishery facts

- Budget 2015 provided \$2.6 million to support fisheries science at the Marine Institute's Centre for Fisheries Ecosystems Research (CFER).
- NL is the only province in Canada to solely fund its own offshore fisheries research.
- The RV Celtic Explorer can accommodate 35 personnel, including 20-22 scientists.
- The Celtic Explorer has been chartered for one month in each of the past five years to support CFER's fisheries science activities.
- The vessel left St. John's Tuesday to survey waters off the northeast coast of the province.



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The Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel is inviting members of the public and stakeholder groups to provide input on hydraulic fracturing in western Newfoundland. Details may be found by visiting www.nlhfrp.ca. All input must be received by the Panel no later than 12 p.m. on June 1, 2015.

Input can be submitted using the fillable forms online at www.nlhfrp.ca, by email to contact@nlhfrp.ca or by conventional mail to:

Dr. Ray Gosine
Chair, Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel
c/o Office of Associate Vice-President (Research)
Bruneau Centre for Research and Innovation, IIC-3067
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL, A1C 5S7

The Panel is also accepting requests for public consultations in Corner Brook and Stephenville, as well as requests for teleconference and face-to-face meetings.

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