

# What We Heard:

## Summary of the Public Survey on Nova Scotia's Aquaculture Coastal Classification System

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### Introduction and Background

Aquaculture, the farming of fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants, is a key part of Nova Scotia's economy. In 2023, it employed nearly 800 people and contributed \$120 million to the provincial economy. As the global demand for seafood rises, Nova Scotia is well-positioned to grow this sector responsibly and sustainably.

To support this, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) has developed an aquaculture Coastal Classification System (CCS). This includes a mapping tool that identifies areas that are potentially suitable for aquaculture. The CCS assesses near-shore areas using criteria aligned with three planning goals:

- Optimizing conditions for the health of farmed species (e.g. temperature extremes, ice, depth)
- Preserving significant habitats and species (e.g. protected areas and wetlands)
- Reducing overlaps with other marine uses (e.g. anchorage, vessel traffic, public access)

#### The CCS aims to:

**01** Simplify access to science-based data and aquaculture info

**02** Highlight areas that may be suited for finfish and shellfish farming

**03** Support responsible, sustainable aquaculture planning

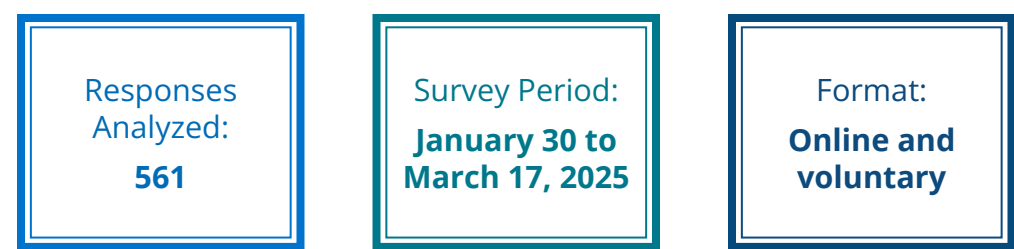
The Centre for Marine Applied Research (CMAR), an independent division of Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation, provides scientific support for the project.

The mapping tool helps users to view interactive maps and information about specific locations (e.g. water temperature, depth). This CCS supports early planning but does not replace licencing requirements. All aquaculture applications still undergo full regulatory review, consultation between the province and the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, and public input as required by legislation and regulations. The CCS is meant to improve transparency and supports exploration of aquaculture potential.

# Engaging with Nova Scotians on the Coastal Classification System

Nova Scotians were invited to share feedback on the CCS via an online survey. Participants could review a project update and factsheets before completing the survey. These materials are available at <https://novascotia.ca/aquaculture-coastal-classification-system/>.

The survey introduced the mapping tool's purpose to interested parties, demonstrated how it can be used, and gathered input on the science-based screening criteria.



## Species in the Coastal Classification System

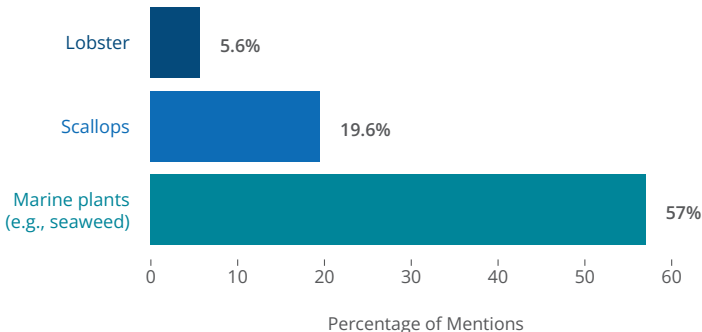
The CCS includes screening assessments for Nova Scotia's top four farmed species: Atlantic salmon, Rainbow trout, Blue mussels, and American oysters.

Participants were asked whether more species should be included. The majority indicated that the current list of species is appropriate.



### Most Commonly Suggested Species Additions

**Figure 1.** Most commonly suggested species additions were based on open-ended survey responses.



# Coastal Classification System Criteria

The CCS criteria are based on data available across Nova Scotia's near-shore coastal waters and are suitable for broad-scale assessment. These criteria were selected through a structured evaluation with eight requirements: relevance, rate ability, clarity, scale, data accessibility, coastal coverage, measurement reliability, and redundancy.

The criteria focus on:

1. Physical conditions needed for the health and well-being of farmed species;
2. Environmental protection and habitat conservation
3. Reducing potential overlaps with other marine activities.

## Screening Criteria by Species

	Atlantic Salmon	Rainbow Trout	Blue Mussels	American Oysters
Extreme Cold	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Extreme Heat	✓	✓	✓	N/A
Water Depth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ice Conditions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wind and Wave Conditions	✓	✓	✓	✓
MSX Declaration Areas	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓
Critical Habitat for Species at Risk	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marine Protected and Conserved Areas	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wild Salmon Rivers	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coastal Wetlands	✓	✓	✓	✓
Terrestrial Protected Areas and Parks	✓	✓	✓	✓
Important Bird Habitats	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public Coastal Access Points	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vessel Traffic	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anchorage Areas	✓	✓	✓	✓
Designated Navigation Features	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marine Renewable Energy Areas	✓	✓	✓	✓
At-Sea Disposal Sites	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shellfish Harvest Area Classification	N/A	N/A	✓	✓
Existing Leases and Easements	✓	✓	✓	✓
Private Water Lots	✓	✓	✓	✓

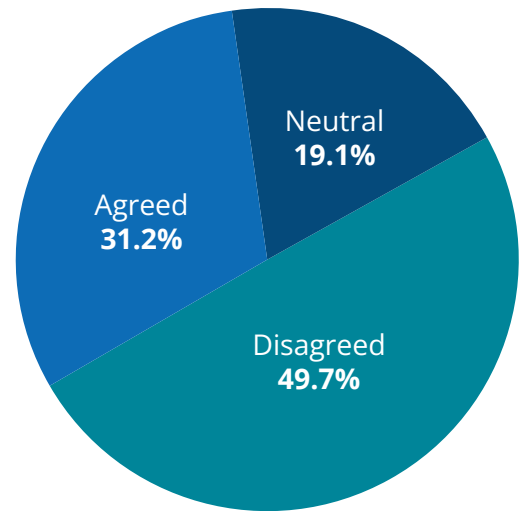
**Table 1.**

This table shows the proposed screening criteria survey respondents were asked to review. Some criteria were not relevant (marked "N/A") for certain species, based on their biology or production method.

## Agreement with Proposed Screening Criteria

**Figure 2.**

Responses to the question: "Do you agree with the proposed criteria for the CCS?" Percentages reflect 561 total survey responses.



## Additional Criteria Suggestions

Participants were invited to suggest additional criteria for consideration as part of the CCS assessments. These open-ended responses were grouped into three categories:



**Note:** Some participants requested clearer explanations of how criteria are defined and used, particularly with respect to different species.

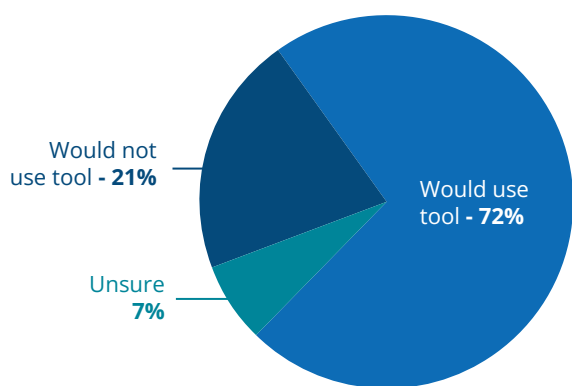
## Mapping Tool Uses

The CCS is intended to provide transparent, high-level assessment of coastal areas for aquaculture suitability. Within the mapping tool, users will find:

- Species-specific suitability maps for Atlantic salmon, Rainbow trout, American oysters, and Blue mussels.
- Data layers (e.g. water depth, ice conditions, wind and wave conditions, etc.) for all near shore coastal waters.

### Participant Map Use

When asked if they could see themselves using the mapping tool, 72% of participants indicated they would use it.



**Figure 3.**

Survey participants were asked whether they could see themselves using the CCS mapping tool. A majority (72%) said they would use the tool, while 21% said they would not, and 7% were unsure. The chart illustrates the distribution of responses.

Participants described possible uses, grouped into:

1. **Informational:** General awareness of coastal activity or nearby aquaculture potential
2. **Positional:** Supporting community input, advocacy, or policy conversations about aquaculture
3. **Developmental:** Supporting lease applications or marine planning

Participants identified a variety of suggestions to improve the use of the mapping tool. These were grouped into common themes:

1. **Ease of use:** A simple, intuitive interface
2. **Transparency:** Access to source data and map layers
3. **Currency:** Regular updates and review of information
4. **Accessibility:** Broad access for all user types

# Additional Comments on the Coastal Classification System

Final open-ended comments reflected several themes. For each theme, example quotes from survey respondents are included.

1. Supporting the tool's purpose and approach, particularly for improving transparency and early-stage planning.
  - "It's a great step to have this information out in the open and easy to access."
  - "I support anything that helps show where aquaculture is appropriate or not, based on evidence."
  - "This kind of tool is long overdue. It gives everyone a place to start from, not just industry or government insiders,"
2. Concerns about the role and impact of the tool, especially in the context of marine finfish aquaculture.
  - "This tool appears to pave the way for more open-net pens rather than assess their risks."
  - "It feels like the tool has already decided aquaculture is expanding, regardless of what the public thinks."
  - "Screening suitability shouldn't mean ignoring the risks that are well documented."
3. Emphasis on community and consultation between the province and the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, transparency, and inclusion.
  - "Community voices and Mi'kmaq input must be part of the process, not an afterthought."
  - "There needs to be more than consultation—it needs to reflect Mi'kmaq consent."
  - "We want real engagement, not just surveys after decisions are made."
4. Concerns about credibility and fairness, particularly regarding the influence of industry voices.
  - "The classification system appears to favour industry interests without properly balancing environmental concerns."
  - "This will be seen as a pro-aquaculture tool unless fairness is built in."
  - "Independent oversight is needed. Otherwise, how do we know it's not biased?"

## How Feedback Was Used

This report is the final summary of feedback gathered through the public engagement survey, which served as the primary opportunity for public input on the CCS. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has used this feedback, along with scientific analysis, to review and refine the tool's screening criteria, and to improve how the mapped information is displayed through the tool. The Department has also worked with its partners, including those noted in the Project Update Report, to finalize the tool.

The Department thanks all who contributed their time and insights. For more information on the CCS, please visit: <https://novascotia.ca/aquaculture-coastal-classification-system/>