

are still growing. Once a Walleye reaches maturity, energy is put more towards spawning and less towards growing (growth rate slows down). The benefits of using 3.5" mesh nets also apply to other fish populations such as Goldeye and Sauger that are harvested both commercially and recreationally.

Blaine, Kevin and I continued to remove fish from the net as Andrew slaved away at the bow of the boat hauling in the heavy net. It was fascinating to see the different species come in – Catfish, Goldeye, Walleye, Sauger and Whitefish. There was not a silent moment in our conversation and Blaine and I seemed to share the same excitement anticipating what was caught in the next few feet of net.



Manitoba Economy & Livelihoods Through Rough Waters

Our conversation led to a great discussion around our economy and the deep investments commercial fishers and local businesses have in the fishery. The impacts of Covid-19 on both the commercial fishing sector and businesses thriving on tourism that depend on non-resident anglers will have and continue to experience significant impacts. However, in relation to the commercial sale of Walleye, fish caught in the larger 3.5" mesh net sell for a higher price than fish caught in a 3" mesh net. This means commercial fishers will earn more from their harvest in the larger mesh size. Thankfully, the market has been historically strong for all

Walleye harvested regardless of size. In fact, the majority of commercial fishers on Lake Winnipeg have expressed their support for the change in the minimum mesh net size to 3.5". They understand the benefits and are supportive of a long-term management plan that will bring sustainability to the fishery. 2020 will be a hard year for them though. Two of the largest fish buyers ceased purchases of high-value Walleye in late March, largely a result of a decline in international markets due to restaurant closures. The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has begun to purchase Walleye at a significantly lower price forcing many fishers to not fish in 2020 until conditions improve. Staff from the Wildlife and



Fisheries Branch have been working closely with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the implementation and advertisement of two federal financial support programs for net fishers and commercial bait fishers. Fishers who expect to experience an income loss in 2020 of more than 25% (as compared to 2018 or 2019) due to Covid-19 can apply for funding through this program.

Plans For Future Wins

Our day together on the water got better by the minute. The four of us finished pulling the nets and made our way back to the docks to meet up with the rest of our gang. Rob Olson, Director of the Wildlife and Fisheries Branch for ARD had his

fishing boat tied off, rods, tackle, snacks and water all set up just waiting for our arrival. We piled into his boat to troll along the shore of Lake Winnipeg and discussed plans for the Lake going forward.

Currently the North Basin of Lake Winnipeg has a minimum mesh net size of 3.75". This will remain at this size and has been at this size for many years. The new implementation of 3.5" in the South and in the Channel reduces the gap between the North and South basins. All impacts will continue to be monitored through the Departments annual index netting program.

Regarding a second phase of Quota Buy Back on Lake Winnipeg, the Minister explained that this



initiative is being considered once consultation occurs.

We ended the day with a fish fry in the park prepared to perfection by our Executive Director, Chris Heald. The day was an exceptional combination of exposure to vast knowledge, interesting science and time well spent with strong individuals, all looking out for the betterment of this fishery. With talented staff and biologists in the Wildlife and Fisheries Branch working under the leadership of a Minister that values fishing both from a recreational and commercial perspective....MWF left that day with nothing but confidence that we are on the right path to a sustainable fishery for everyone. 🐦