

Speaking Notes

for

**The Honourable Bernadette Jordan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the
Canadian Coast Guard**

**At the House Standing Committee on
Fisheries and Oceans:
COVID-19**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity once again to speak with members of the Committee.

I appreciate the invitation to discuss our Government's commitment to help Canada's fish and seafood sector get through these unprecedented and very challenging times. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to evolve, we are working hard to protect Canadians, support harvesters and businesses and ensure that families have the help they need.

After my remarks, I will be happy to answer your questions.

I would like to begin by assuring members that my department remains very much at the forefront in managing Canada's fisheries and protecting the marine environment. As this crisis unfolded, our fishery officers kept up their patrols, surveillance of the North Atlantic right whale continues, and as I indicated in my testimony before you yesterday, the remediation work at Big Bar keeps moving without stop.

Our officials have worked overtime to make sure that stakeholders across the country were being heard. We continue to navigate this crisis together, listening to advice from those who work in the fishery about when to open the various fishing seasons and how to adjust our way of working to make sure that we could continue supporting commercial and recreational fishing.

DFO officials and harbour authority volunteers have worked hard with provincial and territorial counterparts and other partners to ensure the health and safety of essential workers, fish harvesters, and indeed of all Canadians who use our harbours.

The Coast Guard continues its essential operations and remains hard at work every day delivering much-needed search and rescue, icebreaking, maritime security and environmental response.

Today I want to reassure Committee members that we continue to provide essential services in our fisheries sector so that those working in our fisheries can expect to receive the support they need to safely continue feeding Canadians.

Back in January, we were starting to see the kind of impact Covid-19 was having on global economic activity, particularly in the seafood sector, with the decline of overseas export markets.

Since then, my officials and I have been talking to and working with harvesters, aquaculture producers, processors, Indigenous partners, and the provinces and territories about some of the unique pressures the sector has been facing.

As spring approached, we started to plan amidst an uncertain global market. We knew that in order to stabilize the industry as a whole, we would need to develop programs that would provide financial support to both harvesters and processors.

In addition to finding a path through the crisis, harvesters needed to know they would have buyers in addition to financial support to offset the downturn this

season. And when the markets started to recover, we knew we would need to be ready to take advantage of every revenue opportunity.

As you well know, the window to harvest certain stock is limited, so products need to be stored longer and new markets need to be found.

With export markets declining, and domestic food supply becoming more important than ever, the industry will need to respond more to Canadian domestic consumption. With the closure of restaurants across the country Canadians are instead looking to purchase seafood at the store and from local harvesters.

As you know, our Government has delivered economic measures to help individual Canadians and businesses get through the pandemic—through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Business Account, and a number of other tax credits and measures.

We have also been working around the clock to support the Canadian fish and seafood industry adapt to this new reality, as they are the backbone of many of our coastal and rural communities. This has ultimately led to a significant 500 million-dollar investment to support the hardworking women and men of our fisheries.

To deliver these funds, we created the Fish Harvester Benefit, the Fish Harvester Grant, and the Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund.

The Fish Harvester Benefit will provide self-employed commercial harvesters and shareperson crew members who cannot access the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy up to \$847 a week. This includes those in inshore and freshwater fisheries, and fishing under Indigenous commercial communal licences.

The Fish Harvester Grant will provide non-repayable grants of up to \$10,000 to self-employed commercial harvesters who cannot access the Canada Emergency Business Account. Along with the Benefit, these funds can be used to cover the costs of running a fishing business, including increases in costs due to health and safety requirements. We are working to ensure that harvesters can receive these supports this summer.

The \$62.5M Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund is invested directly into the marine processing sector to help tackle a number of challenges and help plants adapt to market changes and new ways of working. Processors on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts can tap into the funds to increase their storage capacity, allowing them to buy more from harvesters and aquaculture operators. The funding can also be used to help rebranding and marketing efforts, to make changes to manufacturing and automated technologies, and to offset the cost of implementing health and safety measures.

While these new programs take into account the unique operational structures of the industry, we know that this season will still be a challenge. That is why we will propose changes to the Fish Harvester's Employment Insurance system which would allow harvesters and sharepersons to file EI claims based on previous years' earnings.

The industry went into this pandemic strong, but we knew this year was going to be unlike anything we've seen before.

Tens of thousands of Canadians were counting on this fishing season for employment, revenue and food.

By investing over half a billion dollars into the seafood sector, our goal is not only to ensure that workers get the financial support they need right now, but that the industry as a whole is placed in a strong position for recovery.

As we continue to move forward in the face of so much global uncertainty, I am confident that we will continue to serve Canadians under these very trying circumstances.

I am happy to take your questions now.

Ahousaht—Nuu Chah Nulth

A renewed nation-to-nation relationship based on recognition, rights, and co-operation with Canada's Indigenous peoples is a top priority for our government.

The Government of Canada is working collaboratively with the five Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations to advance reconciliation in the areas of collaborative governance, increased fishing access and a community fishery that builds on their right to fish and sell fish.

An Incremental Reconciliation Agreement for Fisheries Resources was concluded on September 10, 2019. Currently negotiations are underway towards collaboratively developing a comprehensive reconciliation agreement for fisheries resources.

DFO consulted with the Five Nations and others on a second right-based multi-species fishery management plan for 2020-21 which came into effect in April 2020.

At the same time, our government is working closely and in collaboration with the BC First Nations and all stakeholders towards a renewed salmon allocation policy that is in line with the Court's decision.

Aquaculture Act

COVID-19 has significantly affected the Canadian economy. Now more than ever, we need a Canadian Aquaculture Act that will provide the industry more clarity and certainty, as well as stimulate innovation, investments and job creation across Canada, while further strengthening environmental protections.

The industry has long called for an aquaculture-specific act that addresses the unique attributes of this sector. The new legislation will

support the industry's sustainable development while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

Any path forward will include engagement with the public, environmental organizations, industry, as well as provincial and Indigenous partners.

Aquaculture West Coast Mandate

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation and the health and safety of Canadians is a priority for a government.

As we work with Provinces and Territories to ensure measures are in place to support the safety of Canadians, we remain committed to moving forward responsibly to transition open-net farming on the West Coast.

We know that comprehensive engagement with Indigenous partners, the Province of BC, industry and all other interested parties will take time. This engagement will be underpinned by our mandate to we will not lose sight of our mandate to protect and conserve our wild fish stocks.

If pressed on transition of open net farming by 2025

I am committed to working with the Province and Indigenous communities to move forward responsibly to transition open net-pen farming in coastal British Columbia.

A change like this requires cooperation, consultation, engagement and a thoughtful path forward. This is not a simple task. If we are to have a sustainable shift we need to do this right.

Partnering with the Province and First Nations will be essential to the development and success of the plan. All parties want a plan that is workable, economically feasible and takes into account social considerations.

If pressed on the application to the East Coast

The transition plan will focus only on aquaculture operations on the west coast of Canada, but will need to take into consideration indirect impacts on the industry in the rest of the country.

The current uncertainty around this commitment is resulting in lost economic opportunity and a chilling of foreign direct investment into Canada, both in BC and on the east coast. This transition could potentially stimulate the adoption of new technologies on Canada's East Coast that could further reduce environmental impacts.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Our government understands the importance of protecting the biodiversity and quality of Canada's waters. As such, we are focused on coordinating our efforts to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species in Canada.

Management of aquatic invasive species is a responsibility that the federal government shares with provincial and territorial governments. We continue to work closely with them, along with our US counterparts, to support prevention and response activities that protect our mutual resources.

In response to COVID-19, we are assessing which management actions related to aquatic invasive species are essential at this time, and how to protect the public servants who undertake them.

Mussels

Zebra and Quagga mussels can cause high economic impact to recreational boaters, municipal and industrial water supplies, and to power generation infrastructure.

Lake Winnipeg watershed is the current western invasion front, and DFO is working with our Prairie partners to develop emergency response plans aimed at preventing the spread of the mussels to Western Canada.

DFO is working closely with Canada Border Services Agency to improve enforcement of the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* and prevent invasive mussels from entering Canada.

Asian Carps

In 2017, our government invested \$16 million over five years and \$4 million on-going in the Asian Carp Program to ensure Canada's Great Lakes are well protected from harmful impacts of Asian carps.

Our government takes a comprehensive preventative approach to address the threat of these species.

To date, Asian Carps have not become established in the Canadian waters of the Great Lakes thanks to structured, organized response efforts.

Sea Lamprey

The Sea Lamprey Control Program is administered by the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission to protect native fish species and fisheries in the Great Lakes.

In accordance with a bi-national agreement, Canada contributes over \$10.6 million annually to the control and management of Sea Lamprey in the Great Lakes.

Sea Lamprey are at or close to target population levels in all Great Lakes because of our long-term commitment to the program.

Small Mouth Bass

DFO is very concerned about the presence of the invasive Smallmouth Bass in the Miramichi system.

DFO will continue to work with the province, Indigenous peoples, recreational fishers, and others to mitigate the impact of this aquatic invasive species.

DFO is reviewing a request to authorize the use of a pesticide to eradicate Smallmouth Bass in Miramichi Lake and part of the River. The Department is considering the implications for native Atlantic Salmon, species at risk, other fish species, wildlife, and public safety.

The Department is also developing a long-term plan for the management of this invasive species in the Miramichi River watershed based on prevention, detection, response, and control, as well as sustained collaboration with partners.

In the meantime, the Department and its partners will continue ongoing containment, control and monitoring activities for Smallmouth Bass in the Miramichi watershed.

Atlantic Herring

Our government continues to take action when it comes to sustainably managing our fish stocks and supporting our fisheries.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is aware of the effects that reductions in fishing opportunities have had on harvesters and continues to make science-based efforts to aid rebuilding.

We will continue to take a precautionary approach to ensure that fish stocks are managed sustainably, as well consult with Indigenous groups and all stakeholders on the management of Atlantic herring.

Shortage in Herring Bait Supply

Our government continues to take action when it comes to sustainably managing our fish stocks and supporting our fisheries.

The Department recognizes increased expenses for fishing enterprises due the high cost of bait particularly as a result of low stock abundance for mackerel and herring fisheries.

The Department has encouraged harvesters to consider alternative bait sources and some harvesters have been importing herring and mackerel to reduce the pressures on domestic stocks.

Atlantic Salmon

Conservation of wild Atlantic salmon is a priority for our government.

We are investing in science and engaging with provinces, Indigenous communities, recreational fishers, and other stakeholders to support initiatives that will promote the recovery of Atlantic salmon stocks.

In May 2019, our Government announced the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation: Implementation Plan 2019 to 2021.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada will continue to take a leadership role in both global and domestic actions to reverse the trend of declining stocks of this iconic species.

CAST

DFO is committed to the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon and is taking evidence-based management decisions to protect the fisheries for future generations.

The Government remains supportive of CAST's goals to recover Atlantic Salmon but will not be authorizing the release of hatchery-raised salmon in the Miramichi.

My Department will continue to maintain an open dialogue with all interested stakeholders and partners to hear their concerns and proposals to promote healthy and resilient Atlantic salmon populations.

Avon River—Fish Found

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is aware that a number of fish were found dead on the Avon River.

Fishery officers worked with staff from the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program to determine the cause of death.

The same day new measures were put in place in cooperation with the province of Nova Scotia to prevent further fish kills.

DFO staff have visited the site and have reported that the new measures to protect fish and their habitat have been successful.

Baffinland—Mary River

Protecting the marine environment and marine mammals is a priority, which is why we are ensuring projects are thoroughly assessed.

We ensured that conditions are in place to protect the environment and marine mammals in Phase 1 of the project, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada is also participating in the Nunavut Impact Review Board's review of potential impacts of Phase 2.

The Department is working alongside other stakeholders and Inuit organizations and communities to better understand the potential impacts of the project.

Big Bar

Restoring natural fish passage in the area, as well as worker and public safety, remain top priorities for our government.

Short and long term efforts, including mitigation plans and alternative fish passage systems are ongoing and we are making steady progress to reduce the impact of the landslide on future salmon stocks.

We are also preparing for the installation of a pneumatic fish pump that will transport the fish past the slide when water levels are too high in the fishway.

The protection and conservation of our salmon stocks remains a priority for our government and we continue to work with our First Nations and provincial partners to restore natural fish passage.

If pressed on cost

Fraser Chinook stocks are on the verge of collapse and restoring natural fish passage at Big Bar is a top priority for our government.

During the initial 3-month contract, it became clear that resolving the blockage was a massive undertaking and would take considerable resources to address adequately.

Costs to remediate the slide site are ongoing as we work to sufficiently improve fish passage for the 2020 migrating Fraser salmon.

From the outset of the response to the landslide, DFO has worked in partnership with BC and First Nations governments. Together, we continue to take every possible action to reduce the long-term impact of the landslide on future salmon stocks.

Canada Purchase Program

Since the onset of the health crisis, our government has been working to support every Canadian including those in our seafood sector.

We are doing everything we can to support our harvesters and sea farmers to get their high quality seafood catches and aquaculture products to market.

The announced Surplus Food Purchase Program will help address some of the wild harvest and aquaculture product surplus and provide nutritious food to those in need. Wild fisheries and aquaculture will be allocated part of the \$50 million fund.

I speak on a regular basis with my provincial counterparts, as well as industry and stakeholders and our government is considering all options when it comes to how to best support the women and men of our fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

Canadian Coast Guard

The safety of Canadian Coast Guard employees and mariners is a top priority.

Emergency situations in Canadian waters are a reality, and the Coast Guard stands ready to respond when they arise.

The services that the Coast Guard provide are essential to keeping our waterways safe and the Coast Guard continues to maintain normal operations across the country.

Proximity and Number of Crew Members- CCG

Our Coast Guard provides important, essential services on a daily basis across the country.

Marine search and rescue is often a matter of life and death.

During a search and rescue response, and other critical missions and services provided by the Coast Guard our crew members are required to work in close proximity to each other.

The Coast Guard has adopted a series of operational procedures, including requiring frontline staff to wear personal protective equipment. These procedures will safeguard our personnel and ensure we are ready to deliver services for Canadians across the country.

[Testing of Crew Members- CCG](#)

The Canadian Coast Guard is committed to the health and safety of its members, while continuing to provide essential services to Canadians, mariners and our partners.

The Coast Guard has implemented pre-screening and is directing crew members who are showing symptoms of COVID-19 to follow advice from their local health authorities and get tested. It has also taken enhanced health and safety measures at shore-based sites and onboard vessels, following the guidance of public health authorities. These include stronger building access procedures, and additional cleaning protocols and procedures that must be followed in the event of illness.

Crews on vessels in the Arctic this season will receive regular health checks on board to monitor their continuing health. There will be no non-essential visits to northern communities this season.

Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund

The women and men who work in Canada's fish and seafood sector are the economic drivers for many of our coastal and rural communities.

That is why I was happy to announce \$62.5 million dollars for the new Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund which will go directly to the fish and seafood processing sector.

We have always said that we would adapt our measures as the situation progresses and that is what we are doing.

Chinook Recreational Fishery

Protection of wild stocks in BC, including the Fraser River Chinook stocks that are on the verge of collapse is a priority for our government and we continue to base our decisions on science as well as consult with impacted indigenous groups and stakeholders.

Interim fisheries management measures for the Chinook sport fishery were announced on April 1 to allow time for a technical review of the 2019 measures, and for consultations on possible adjustments for the coming season.

We are currently working with groups to evaluate any proposed changes for consistency with conservation objectives, obligations to First Nations and Pacific Salmon Treaty requirements. A decision will be informed by these evaluations and will be made in the coming weeks.

Climate Change—Ocean Acidification, Low Oxygen, Sea Ice

Our Government and Canadian industry are committed to protecting marine mammals from entanglement in fishing gear and maintaining access to the U.S. market.

We continue to work closely with Canadian harvesters, and other stakeholders to meet the new U.S. import requirements coming into force in 2022.

When it comes to the protection of North Atlantic Right Whale, we are proud of the robustness of our measures and are confident that they meet or exceed the U.S. standards.

Delay of Fishery

Changes to the management of a fishery, such as a delaying its opening, are made in consultation with harvesters and processors, and after considering a variety of factors including the conservation and protection of stock as well as the health and safety of harvesters.

Our government is in constant communication with our provincial and industry partners to discuss these issues and to assess each situation on a case by case basis.

We are ensuring that the decisions we make today support the industry in the short-term, and will allow for a strong recovery in the future.

Eastern Fisheries Funds (QFF, AFF)

Since our government launched the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, the Quebec Fisheries Fund and the Canada Fish and Seafood Opportunities Fund, we have provided:

- Over \$140 million in support, towards
- Over \$250 million in projects, across
- over 545 projects.

While these programs has been very well utilized and have led to numerous innovations and improvements in our fisheries, I believe they will be invaluable in the post Covid 19 recovery of the industry.

I am speaking regularly with my provincial and territorial counterparts, and these programs are well placed to aid our industry going forward as we move towards

Elver Fishery Closures

Our government continues to ensure that our fisheries, including the elver fishery, remains sustainable for years to come.

After careful consideration, and due to the significant risk continued harvesting poses to the conservation and protection of the American eel, the elver fishery closure has been extended for an additional 45 days.

This step is necessary to address immediate threats to the species.

Since the initial closure, DFO has been communicating with impacted indigenous communities and license holders to determine a path forward.

We will continue to undertake consultations with our partners throughout this time.

If pressed on COVID-19

We recognize this is a challenging time for Canadians, and we are working to support them while also continuing to protect stocks that may be at risk.

We continue to make our fisheries management decisions based on science, and in consultation with stakeholders.

If pressed on closing of FSC fishery

We respect the right for indigenous groups to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

The closure at this time is for conservation purposes to ensure that the stock can recover.

Again, we will be undertaking consultations with impacted indigenous communities and commercial harvesters during the closure.

If Pressed – Listing under the Species at Risk Act

Following the recommendation received from COSEWIC, the Government of Canada is analyzing and considering the option of listing American Eel as a threatened species at risk under the Species at Risk Act.

This is a very complex decision, with many social and economic implications.

Energie Saguenay Project

Protecting our aquatic environments while considering economic interests of regional communities who rely on these industries for their livelihoods is a priority for our government.

My department will continue to actively participate in the environmental assessment for the Énergie Saguenay Project.

DFO will continue to provide expert advice and evaluate potential physical impacts to the marine and freshwater environment, including the assessment of impacts on marine mammals from underwater noise.

Exploratory Drilling NL Offshore

Our government is protecting our marine environment while providing the space for economic activities that are not harmful to conservation objectives.

We have worked with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to plan the sustainable use of Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore area.

This regulation concerning exploratory drilling is informed by scientific data and will only apply when rigorous environmental and consultation conditions are met.

Oil and gas activities, mining, dumping and bottom trawling within Marine Protected Areas continues to be prohibited

Fish and Fish Habitat Protection

Measures to protect aquatic ecosystems, including aquatic species at risk, remain in effect.

The Department will continue to process requests for *Fisheries Act* authorizations, as well as permits under the *Species at Risk Act*.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, requests for flexibility will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

It is important that staff and proponents follow the safety and security measures prescribed by public health agencies and take all the measures needed to protect the health of workers.

Our Department will continue to meet its duty to consult. As needed, consultations will be undertaken through appropriate means, including through phone, email or fax, based upon the circumstances and requests of the Indigenous community with whom we are consulting.

Firearms

The safety of government employees and the public is a top priority and Fisheries and Oceans Canada is addressing the findings and recommendations of its internal audit on the Management of Firearms.

The Department already has strong controls in place and will ensure those controls will be applied across the Department.

Departmental officials will continue to verify our inventory of firearms and will also continue to review our practices on inventory management and access control over firearms.

Fleet Renewal

The men and women of the Canadian Coast Guard are at work every day across the country, and our government is providing them the tools they need to keep Canadians safe and our economy moving.

In 2019, the Government announced the largest investments ever made to renew the Canadian Coast Guard fleet with 24 new large ships: 16 Multi-Purpose Vessels, two Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships and six Program Icebreakers.

Our significant commitment to renew the Coast Guard fleet will provide our crews with state of the art tools and preserve the world class marine safety regime that Canada enjoys.

If pressed on timelines

We have not been advised of substantial delays at this time. The Coast Guard will plan its operational schedule based on any revised timelines, as required, and will continue to meet its operational demands and service delivery to Canadians.

The Coast Guard uses a zonal approach where ships can be cascaded based on requirements.

We also have a Supply Arrangement with the private sector which allows the Coast Guard to call on private sector suppliers for icebreaking and other services to meet very short-term needs.

Icebreaking

Coast Guard icebreakers are essential to Canada's economy by supporting year-round marine trade and ensuring the safe passage of goods to keep our economy moving.

By investing in six new Program Icebreakers the Government has taken steps to ensure the continuation of essential icebreaking services in Atlantic Canada, the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, as well as the Arctic.

Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation

Similar to much of the industry across Canada, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is facing a considerable downturn in product demand.

While the Corporation operates at arm's length from the Department, I have been informed it will continue to fulfill its legislated mandate in the Northwest Territories to buy all fish offered for export.

We also understand the Corporation will continue to operate as a licensed fish buyer in the open market environments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, buying fish when it has orders to fill.



We are working with all stakeholders to address challenges head-on and we continue to explore all options to ensure that the fish and seafood industry has necessary support available to weather this storm

If pressed for an opinion on the FFMC's decision

As this is an operational decision made by an arms-length Crown Corporation, the FFMC is best placed to comment further on this hopefully temporary measure.

FSC Fisheries

To respect the priority nature of food, social, and ceremonial fisheries, licensing will continue in line with previous years.

We strongly recommend that all harvesters, including those harvesting for food, social and ceremonial purposes, adhere to all public health advice and guidelines.

Food, social and ceremonial fisheries are intended to meet the needs of indigenous communities, and in particular now to address the challenge of food security.

Ghost Gear

Our government is proud of the commitment we have made to reduce plastic pollution and ensure our oceans are protected and remain healthy for generations.

Ghost gear is a major contributor to marine plastic debris which is why we signed onto the Ghost Gear Initiative and last year announced the Ghost Gear Fund to assist fish harvesters, environmental groups, Indigenous communities, the aquaculture industry, and coastal



communities to find and retrieve harmful ghost gear from the ocean and dispose of it responsibly so that it can be recycled back into the economy.

The health of our oceans is vital to the economic, cultural, and social well-being of Canada's coastal communities. We know plastic pollution harms Canada's oceans, wildlife, communities and our economy—and that is why we are taking action.

Humpback whale sighting

Fisheries and Oceans Canada works closely with the Quebec Marine Mammal Emergency Network, which coordinates the monitoring of the humpback whale, which traveled outside its usual range.

DFO fishery officers and the Quebec Marine Mammal Emergency Networks intervention team have been patrolling the areas visited by the whale since last Thursday in order to document the behavior of the animal and to ensure that the regulations on marine mammals are respected and that the animal is not disturbed.

The animal does not appear to be distressed or injured. No action is taken at this time. However, DFO and the Quebec Marine Mammal Emergency Network are evaluating different scenarios in collaboration with experts on marine mammals.

IUU

My department is committed to having a leading role in the fight against Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing, which is so devastating to ecosystems and economies around the world.

Through the G7 Healthy Oceans Initiative, Canada has committed nearly \$12 million to a variety of projects.



As an example, Canada, in coordination with US partners, is engaged in regular monitoring, control and surveillance efforts of the high seas North Pacific, to ensure salmon are protected during their migration.

This includes resources to assess new surveillance technologies, improve information sharing, and build capacity to combat IUU fishing in the developing world.

Canada's ratification of the Port State Measures Agreement is a demonstration of our commitment to the to target IUU fishing.

Impact on DFO Department Internally

During the COVID Crisis, my Department has been able to continue to deliver on our key business lines and operations with very limited interruptions.

For the entire Department, only 10 employees were personally impacted by COVID-19.

The majority of our staff were following Public Health Authorities guidance and are working remotely. The Department reacted very quickly by adding IT capacity and bandwidth to allow our staff to be fully productive working from home.

Staff who could not work from home and were critical to our business lines continued to work in our offices, in the field or aboard a vessel, delivering services to Canadians.

As provinces and municipalities start easing restrictions, our Department is developing strategies to prepare for a "new normal" and for the progressive return of employees to their usual workplaces.

Industry/Market impacts

We know that COVID-19 is having an impact on global economic activity and we are looking at ways to help the sector best position itself to sell its high quality product in this challenging time, and for the longer-term as markets gradually recover.

We continue to share market intelligence and feedback from the sector to help support the livelihood of this vital industry, while always ensuring the health and safety of fishers, processing plant workers, and aquaculturists are front and centre.

With over half a billion dollars in investments, our Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund will help the industry access the domestic retail market and our Fish Harvester Benefit and grants will support harvesters during this difficult time.

This is on top of existing DFO funding mechanisms in place that position the sector to compete in domestic and international markets.

For example, the Fisheries Funds, federal-provincial cost shared programs in partnership with the Atlantic Provinces, British Columbia and Quebec, are already in place to fund the sector to research and apply new and innovative ways to harvest, process and deliver high-quality, sustainably sourced fish and seafood.

The Canadian Fish and Seafood Opportunities Fund (CFSOF), which is the nationally-accessible pillar of the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, aims to increase the recognition of Canada as a global leader in providing high-quality fish and seafood to domestic and international markets.

DFO will continue to work with federal, provincial and industry partners, to examine how these investments can be best used to position the sector to sell its product in this challenging period.

Aquaculture operators can also apply for support from a number of federal COVID-support measures, including the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, as well as loans from the Canada Emergency Business Account, Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, and Farm Credit Canada. My department has created comprehensive webpages to help our fisheries and aquaculture sectors navigate federal COVID support that may be available to them during these difficult times.

Our fisheries and aquaculture sectors are essential to our food supply and we are working around the clock to support the industry.

Licence Conditions – LFA

It was brought to my attention that there was a new condition added to licenses for lobster harvesters in some Gulf region LFAs.

This condition was not authorized. Accordingly, I directed my officials to remove the condition in question and I can confirm that it has been done.

I want to thank the harvesters and local MPs for raising their concerns to me directly.

Marine Protected Areas

Our Government recognizes the importance of protecting Canada's marine and coastal areas – this is why we have exceeded our 2020 target of 10% ahead of the deadline.

On August 1, 2019, the Marine Protected Area in the High Arctic Basin was designated under the *Oceans Act*, to bring the total marine and coastal areas conserved in Canada to 13.81%, up from just 1% in 2016.



Our Government will work with our partners in the provinces and territories, Indigenous communities, and Canadians from coast to coast to create a plan to increase marine protection to 25% by 2025, working towards 30% by 2030.

Moderate Livelihood Fishery

Our government is committed to its relationship with Indigenous peoples.

The Supreme Court of Canada recognized a right to harvest in pursuit of a moderate livelihood and DFO has been working at negotiation tables to implement the right in communities across the East Coast and Quebec.

We continue to work with Indigenous communities on fisheries programs and initiatives in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

Sale of Food, Social, and Ceremonial Catches...

Food, social and ceremonial allocations are based on consultations between DFO and individual Indigenous communities; food, social and ceremonial harvesting is only for the Indigenous harvester and their communities and allocations are not intended for sale.

Fishery officers continue to monitor fishing activities in all FSC fisheries, and have taken a range of targeted enforcement actions to address illegal fishing and buying of these catches.

We work with all harvesters to ensure that the *Fisheries Act* is followed, and Indigenous fishing rights are respected.

North Atlantic Right Whales

The protection and conservation of the endangered North Atlantic right whale is a priority for our government.

Canada's right whale surveillance program have detected whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence consistently since May 3.

DFO has implemented its 2020 fisheries management measures as planned, including its aerial, at sea and in the water surveillance plan and temporary and season long area closures to fishing activity.

Fishery officers are currently monitoring compliance of harvesters with fishing measures and area closures.

NARW US Market Access

Our Government and Canadian industry are committed to protecting marine mammals from entanglement in fishing gear and maintaining access to the U.S. market.

We continue to work closely with Canadian harvesters, and other stakeholders to meet the new U.S. import requirements coming into force in 2022.

When it comes to the protection of North Atlantic Right Whale, we are proud of the robustness of our measures and are confident that they meet or exceed the U.S. standards.

Marine Mammal Response

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving global challenge, and the health and safety of Canadians continues to be the Government of Canada's top priority.

During the pandemic, Fisheries and Oceans Canada continues to deliver on its mandate to protect North Atlantic right whales, in alignment with advice from public health authorities.

As part of our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, DFO will evaluate all marine mammal incidents, including strandings and entanglements of North Atlantic right whales, and will determine responses on a case-by-case basis.

Should an incident arise, the Department will make decisions working closely with partners and using the latest guidance from public health authorities.

Hydrophones/Acoustic Monitoring

The protection and conservation of the endangered North Atlantic right whale is a priority for our government.

This year we have introduced measures that will improve our ability to detect right whales so that we can better respond to their presence in our waters with the additional use of near-real time hydrophones..

This acoustic method compliments our aerial surveillance program which is our primary means for detecting right whales in Atlantic Canada.

These monitoring measures as well as dynamic and season long closures is helping us protect the whales and ensuring our fisheries remain sustainable.

Pacific Herring

Our government continues to take action when it comes to sustaining our stocks and supporting our fisheries and we base our decisions on sound scientific evidence.

The proposed harvest level for the 2019-2020 fishing season in the Strait of Georgia has been reduced by more than 50% from the allowable catch in the 2018-2019 fishing season in response to the lower stock forecast for 2020.

The reduced allowable catch is consistent with the conservation goals of the management approach and provides opportunity for industry, including those First nations that participate in the commercial fishery.

We continue to maintain an open dialogue with all interested stakeholders and partners to hear their concerns, and to inform decisions based on the best available science.

Pacific Salmon

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation and the health and safety of Canadians is a priority for our government.

As we work with Provinces and Territories to ensure measures are in place to support the safety of Canadians, we also continue our work to protect and conserve our wild pacific salmon.

Over the years, our government has taken action and made real investments in the conservation of our stocks including moving forward on all 75 of the Cohen Commission recommendations, to the \$142 million British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund.

As well, important work to restore natural fish passage at the Big Bar slide site continues.

Protecting our wild salmon stocks remains a priority for our government.

Port of Quebec

The project is currently undergoing a rigorous environmental assessment, a process based on science and extensive consultations with Indigenous peoples and the public.

The Department makes available to stakeholders its most accurate scientific information on species present, including Striped Bass, a species listed on the *Species at Risk Act*.

Should the project proceed to the regulatory phase, the Department will consider any applications for authorizations under the *Fisheries Act* or permits under the *Species at Risk Act*.

Port of Montreal Expansion

The Port of Montreal Expansion Project is currently undergoing a rigorous environmental assessment, including extensive consultations with Indigenous peoples and the public.

No decisions have been made at this time as to whether authorizations or permits under the *Fisheries Act* or *Species at Risk Act* will be required.

Protecting species at risk is a shared responsibility, and our government is committed to working with provinces, territories and all Canadians in implementing the *Species at Risk Act*.

PRV

Our government continues to protect and recover wild Pacific salmon stocks.

After thorough consideration and analysis, we have determined that testing for the BC strain of PRV-1 is not required to authorize the movement of live fish.

We will adapt and adjust our approach to aquaculture management, as needed, as new scientific evidence becomes available.

Building on a number of initiatives, we are finalizing a Framework for Aquaculture Risk Management, which outlines how we employ the precautionary approach in relation to the federal management of the industry.

We are also working with the aquaculture industry in BC to implement enhanced monitoring for Heart and Skeletal Muscle Inflammation and Jaundice Syndrome at marine net pens, as well as screening freshwater hatcheries for two non-native strains of PRV.

DFO continues to engage the BC government, First Nations, industry, and environmental non-governmental organizations on fish health management approaches via DFO's Indigenous and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Body and its Fish Health Technical Working Group to protect wild salmon and enhance environmental sustainability of aquaculture in BC.

Recreational Fisheries

In support of provincial public health efforts, delays to recreational fishing seasons were put in place to respect emergency measures aimed at flattening the transmission curve of COVID-19.

We are working closely with the provinces and territories to support their efforts related to recreational fisheries.

In DFO's Pacific Region, due to the current pandemic and associated travel restrictions, the sale of recreational licences to people who are not residents of Canada is suspended until border restrictions are lifted.

Coast Guard, in collaboration with other federal departments, is working to manage recreational boating activities and mariners are encouraged to avoid non-essential travel whenever possible.

Research Impacts

The health and safety of Canadians is the absolute priority of our government.

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation and important science work will continue in alignment with advice of public health authorities.

At this time, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has suspended lab and field-based science activities until June 15 and only operational activities that support a critical service to Canadians, like safe navigation, will be undertaken.

We will continue to re-evaluate this timeline and while also ensuring that important science work continues.

On Pacific Herring

The health and safety of Canadians is the absolute priority of our government.

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation and important science work will continue in alignment with advice of public health authorities.

Regarding herring, my department is putting in place alternative assessment methods when required such as the use of surface surveys to replace the dive surveys for Pacific Herrings.

Safety of Workers General

Our government's top priority is the safety and security of our employees.

The women and men who work in our fisheries and processing plants, on board our Coast Guard vessels or in our operational centers are doing an essential service for us during this critical time.

Every Canadian has the right to a safe and healthy workplace.

It is important that businesses, along with public health agencies, take all the measures needed to protect the health of the workers.

Our government will be there every step of the way to help our fish harvesters and processors, while ensuring that Canadians continue to have access to high quality seafood.

Safety- Atlantic Canada

The health and safety all Canadians remains our number one priority.

Provinces are working with local groups to ensure health and safety protocols are in place for those working in the fishery and processing plants.

After extensive consultations with harvesters, member associations, processors, and others, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has delayed some fisheries across Atlantic Canada and is currently addressing other requests. Delays allow the industry time to work with the province to implement necessary health and safety measures.

We know there is more to do to, and we will continue working to ensure everyone is captured by federal support programs so they are able to make the best choice for themselves and their family.

Safety – Collaboration with Provinces

We support the provinces in their health and safety guidelines. All governments across Canada have shown in their actions that the safety of our communities is the top priority.

We are working around the clock to keep the seafood sector supported – from fishers and harvesters, to processors and industry – as this is a critical sector for coastal communities and they are essential to maintaining food supply chains.

Safety is still number one and we need to listen to the provincial governments on what they determine to be best for their provinces right now.

Sea Observer Requirements

As part of the effort to control the spread of COVID-19, the requirement for at-sea observers was temporarily suspended on April 2. Since then, the situation has evolved, with most coastal provinces beginning phased re-openings of their economic and social activities.

In the interest of aligning with provincial and territorial approaches, DFO is implementing a conditional resumption of the at-sea observer program that requires both the at-sea observer corporation and the fishing vessel to implement risk mitigation measures that align with provincial and territorial guidelines.

We recognize the unique nature of this situation and remain committed to working with industry and partners across government to determine the best path forward given the evolving global response to COVID-19.

Harassment

Fisheries and Oceans Canada takes the issue of harassment of at-sea observers very seriously, and follows up on every reported instance.

Every worker has the right to a safe and healthy workplace.

DFO meets regularly with designated at-sea observers and companies on operational issues and challenges, including harassment.

Harassment reporting and response have been prioritized as part of the renewal of DFO's suite of policies related to the At-Sea Observer Program.

At-sea observers who feel they are being harassed can report any instances to their local Conservation & Protection detachment, or to local police.

Seal Hunting Pacific

The sustainable management of Canadian fisheries is important to the health of the marine environment and to coastal and Indigenous communities whose livelihoods are supported by the ocean.

We understand the concerns regarding pinniped predation on fish stocks and DFO ensures that the best available science is considered in making management decisions for seals in sustaining a healthy and productive aquatic ecosystem.

While seals and sea lions do eat salmon, salmon represent a small proportion on average of their diet, and they are known to eat other salmon predators.

We continue to work with environmental groups and Indigenous communities as well as stakeholders to improve the conservation and management of our fish stocks.

Seal Hunting Atlantic

The sustainable management of Canadian fisheries is important to coastal and Indigenous communities whose livelihoods are supported by the ocean.

We understand the concerns of harvesters regarding seal predation on fish stocks and that is why we committed to the creation of a Task Team on Atlantic seal science to help better understand the impact of seal populations on their ecosystem.

The Task Team members have been identified and include fish harvesters and other stakeholders who will soon begin work on this initiative aimed at strengthening the science basis for decision making.

Search and Rescue-Incident

Our thoughts remain with the families of those involved in this tragic incident and the community of St. Lawrence.

We understand that the family and friends of Mr. Kettle have partnered with private interests to continue the recovery effort.

The Canadian Coast Guard has provided coordinates related to the search, including the FV Sarah Anne's Last Known Position (LKP) to assist in the private recovery efforts.

Seafood Traceability

Under the leadership of the Minister of Health, our government is committed to developing a boat-to-plate traceability program.

To support this initiative, my department is working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to develop options that could help Canadian fishers better market their high-quality products.

A priority for my department is to support the Canadian fishing industry in meeting traceability requirements that give access to important international markets.

Shellfish Traceability—Illegal Sale

Our Government is committed to providing Canadians with access to safe shellfish. The safety of Canada's food supply is a responsibility shared by industry and federal and provincial governments.

Any harvest occurring in conflict with established rules and regulations has the potential to negatively impact the conservation of shellfish populations and food safety. Therefore, my department is targeting illegal harvesting and selling of shellfish in British Columbia, including suspected laundering of illegal products through legitimate aquaculture businesses.

My department will investigate any reports of illegal harvesting violations and will take appropriate enforcement actions, including prosecution.

Shrimp

The fish harvesting sector is an essential service, and as such the Government has not taken the decision to cancel any commercial fishing seasons.

The Government's focus has been, and continues to be, on working with harvesters to help mitigate health risks related to Covid-19.

The Government has also recently announced a suite of measures to support harvesters who are facing financial challenges due to Covid-19, including the Fish Harvester Benefit and the Fish Harvester Grant.

If pressed on lack of markets and poor prices

We know COVID-19 is having an impact on global economic activity and the Department continues to monitor impacts on trade and Canadian exporters of seafood.

The Department does not have a mandate on price setting. We would like to find opportunities to develop markets closer to home.

To support seafood processors during these difficult times, the Government has recently launched the Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund.

Small Craft Harbours

Harbour authorities have full authority to restrict access to small craft harbours, and to apply other safety measures.

While members of the general public often visit harbour locations, public gatherings including at small craft harbours are currently prohibited.

In order to protect health and safety, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is supportive of restricting access to authorized users only.

Southern Resident Killer Whales

Our government is committed to the protection of Canada's resident killer whales and to the recovery of these populations.

We will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples, key stakeholders, international partners and the province of British Columbia on immediate actions to reduce the impact of marine shipping and assist in the recovery of the Southern Resident Killer Whale.

The Government has advanced initiatives to address the three key threats to the Southern Resident Killer Whale through the \$1.5-billion Oceans Protection Plan, the \$167.4-million Whales Initiative and \$61.5 million in additional measures specific to the Southern Resident Killer Whale.

Supplementary Estimates

The \$559.6 million being presented as part of these Estimates is mainly comprised of statutory amounts related to payments to support the fish and seafood industry through the COVID-19 pandemic.

This includes the Fish Harvester Benefit, and Fish Harvester Grant as well as the Canada Seafood Stabilization Fund.

Of the total amount presented, the Department is seeking \$27.4M in funding through voted appropriations mostly for the short-term response to the Big Bar Landslide on the Fraser River in British Columbia and for the Canadian Coast Guard's Polar Icebreaker Project.

Polar Icebreaker (\$6.6 million)

Funding will be used to continue the vessel design refresh and for project management office costs.

With the considerable advancements in icebreaker designs and studies of ship to ice interaction since the last Coast Guard heavy icebreaker was designed and built, the project will leverage these new contemporary designs to provide a vessel that will deliver the required capability, while ensuring the highest standard of operational safety.

Support for fisheries

Since the onset of this health crisis, our government has worked on an urgent basis to provide our fish harvesters and industry with the support they need.

We expanded the CERB to ensure seasonal workers and fish harvesters can access the benefit.

We also introduced the new Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund which will go directly to the fish and seafood processing sector.

Recently I announced \$469 million to fund the Fish Harvesters Benefit of up to \$847 a week to those whose income has decreased by at least 25%, and the Fish Harvester Grant of up to \$10,000 for self-employed fishers to cover other costs.

We will also introduce changes that will allow self-employed harvesters and sharepersons to qualify for next year's EI Fishing Benefits based on last year's earnings.

These investments are ensuring that the fish and seafood industry has the support available to weather this storm.

Support for Indigenous Communities

We recognize that the impact on Indigenous communities could be particularly acute given fisheries and aquaculture related activities are the main economic driver in many small, isolated, coastal communities, and the importance of fish in the context of food security in Indigenous communities.

The Government has developed numerous economic support measures in response to COVID-19, for which Indigenous fisheries participants may be eligible and are encouraged to apply as needed.

Recently I announced \$469 million to fund the Fish Harvesters Benefit that will provide up to \$10,164 to self-employed harvesters and sharepersons whose income has decreased by at least 25%, and the Fish Harvester Grant of up to \$10,000 for self-employed fishers to cover other costs.

The Fish Harvester Benefit will be available to self-employed Indigenous fish harvesters, including those who are community-designated fishers under communal commercial fishing licences.

The Fish Harvester Grant will be available to Indigenous communities or community-owned business entities that hold a communal commercial fishing licence or Indigenous harvesters who are designated by their community under a communal commercial fishing licence.

We will also introduce changes that will allow self-employed harvesters and sharepersons to qualify for next year's EI Fishing Benefits based on last year's earnings.

We continue to assess the variety of factors that impact program eligibility for Indigenous fisheries participants and will continue to work to bridge any gaps that emerge.

For example, we have extended the eligibility for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy to incorporated businesses owned by Indigenous governments; these entities will be able to access the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy for their waged employees.

Support for Inland Fishery (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan)

Our government continues to work on an urgent basis to provide our fish harvesters and industry with the support they need.

Similar to the rest of the fishers across Canada, inland fishers are eligible for the new expanded CERB and, additional benefits are available for fishing enterprises including the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, Business Credit Availability Program, and the Canada Emergency Business Account.

Recently I announced \$469 million to fund the Fish Harvesters Benefit that will provide up to \$10,164 to self-employed harvesters and sharepersons whose income has decreased by at least 25%, and the Fish Harvester Grant of up to \$10,000 for self-employed fishers to cover other costs.

We will also introduce changes that will allow self-employed harvesters and sharepersons to qualify for next year's EI Fishing Benefits based on last year's earnings.

Support for Public/Recreational Fishery (British Columbia)

We sympathize with the communities impacted by limited salmon harvesting opportunities and we are open to exploring all practical solutions.

In light of the on-going health crises, we encourage small businesses to access the Canada Emergency Business Account which provides interest-free loans to small businesses.

We also expanded the CERB to include those earning up to \$1000, seasonal workers and workers who have exhausted their EI.

As we work with provinces and territories to ensure measures are in place and explore all options, we also continue our work to protect and conserve our wild Pacific fisheries.

Over the years, our government has made real investments in the conservation of our stocks, including the \$142 million British Columbia Salmon Fund and we will continue to work with indigenous groups and all stakeholders to protect this important species.

Support for Oyster Markets

Since the onset of this health crisis, our government has worked on an urgent basis to provide our shellfish harvesters and farmers with the support they need to help address industry and market concerns.

We are providing support of over half a billion including the Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund to increase processor and storage capacity.

Aquaculture operators can also apply for support from diverse federal COVID-support measures, including the Canada Emergency Wage

Subsidy, as well as loans from the Canada Emergency Business Account, Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, and Farm Credit Canada.

We know that the industry continues to face challenges and these investments will help support shellfish harvesters and farmers during this difficult time.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Fish and seafood provide a healthy sustainable protein choice that Canadians have always relied on and they are an essential part of our food supply chain.

We have heard very clearly from fish processors and the industry that having enough workers will be a challenge.

That is why we lifted entry restrictions for temporary foreign workers coming into Canada and recently announced funding to ensure the sector has the capacity to access the labour force needed while keeping Canadians and workers safe.

We will continue to work with all stakeholders to support our fisheries and aquaculture sectors during this challenging time.

Unit 1 Redfish

The Unit 1 Redfish fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence is under moratorium, though the stock shows signs of strong recovery.

Along with a small index fishery which provides fishing data to the science process, there is currently a small experimental fishery in place to allow harvesters the opportunity to test different gear types and to collect data on redfish biology and distribution as well as information on bycatch of other species.

DFO will continue to work with the Redfish Advisory Committee to develop a sustainable harvest strategy for a future commercial redfish fishery in Unit 1.

Access to Redfish

Our government understands the importance of the fishing industry to the Atlantic provinces and Quebec.

The biomass of Unit 1 Redfish has increased significantly in recent years and a commercial fishery is expected in the future.

Currently, the extensive presence of small fish, below the minimal commercially harvestable size, prevents the immediate lifting of the moratorium.

We look forward to the results of the experimental fishing work that is underway in Unit 1 in helping us move forward appropriately in collaboration with industry and Indigenous interests.

Whale Sanctuary

The conservation and protection of Canada's marine resources, including marine mammals, is a top priority for the Government of Canada.

Should a proposal to establish a whale sanctuary in Canada be put forward it will be reviewed at that time, with other government authorities as appropriate.

Our Government believes whales and dolphins should not be kept in captivity which is why we included these provisions in the modernization of the Fisheries Act.