

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: ANOTHER OPENING NECESSARY FOR MODEST MACKEREL BAIT FISHERY

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St. John's, NL – The Union representing inshore fish harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador is requesting a second opening of the Atlantic Mackerel Bait Fishery that was closed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on August 18th. The closure was announced for conservation purposes as landings approached the second 235 tonne portion of the total allowable catch (TAC) since opening just 3-days prior on August 15th.

“Given the very short duration of this fishery, and the clear abundance that harvesters experienced, it is well within reason for our Union to request another opening,” says FFAW-Unifor Secretary-Treasurer Jason Spingle. “DFO extending harvesters another week would have been fairer and provided some valuable information.”

On March 30th, 2022, DFO announced a moratorium on Atlantic mackerel commercial and bait fisheries, despite evidence that the assessment of Atlantic mackerel was not accurately reflecting the status of the stock, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador waters. FFAW had proposed a modest quota of 10,000t for a directed commercial fishery in 2024 for mackerel license holders, and Minister Diane LeBouthillier did not respond to the proposal.

While the announcement of a bait fishery was not what harvesters had been hoping for, it was believed that, at the very least, the temporal coverage would help bridge the existing information gaps.

Long-time harvesters have presented detailed observations of mackerel abundance in NL waters at assessments and at the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee (AMAC). Harvesters on the south coast continue to report an abundance of 18-inch mackerel, with a range of mackerel sizes still being reported in waters off the Northeast Coast and Avalon peninsula. In addition, harvesters, particularly in 3K, have noted the wide range of mackerel sizes (e.g., 15 to 45 cm mackerel), which means that there is more than one cohort or age class in the catch. FFAW-Unifor has been advocating for additional mackerel research for several years, given the important changes observed in distribution and spawning patterns that are not accounted for by DFO-Science's current surveys.

“Another opening to allow NL harvesters a reasonable opportunity to catch some bait is low hanging fruit for DFO given our province's history of a fully monitored directed fishery that provided top quality product in a fall fishery. Abundance is being experienced in all mackerel fishing areas, which should also influence commitment to increasing stock assessment surveys in response to at-sea observations that the biomass of mackerel is being underestimated,” Spingle concluded.

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