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C.B. fishers react to mackerel, herring fishery closures



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SYDNEY — This year will be the first in 27 years that Pat Briand doesn't fish mackerel.

The owner at Cathy Erlene Fisheries in Dingwall, N.S. said he was surprised by DFO's Wednesday announcement of the closure of the mackerel and herring fisheries.

"We didn't see this coming," said Briand. "Maybe somewhat but not complete closure. I figured the overall tack would drop to half of what it was last year."

The mackerel fishery is still reeling from a late quota announcement last year that shortened the season.

In the announcement, the DFO said southern Gulf spring herring and Atlantic mackerel stocks "are in the critical zone."

"Urgent action must be taken in the short-term to give these stocks a chance to recover and ensure the longterm sustainability and prosperity of East Coast fisheries," the department said in a news release.

The release noted that measures taken in recent years, such as minimum mesh sizes in nets, daily catch limits and dockside monitoring of catches "have not been enough," rendering necessary the closure.

'BIG DOWNER' "That was our main bread and butter, if you want to call it, the mackerel fishery," said Briand, who began fishing 57 years ago when he was 13. "And (this announcement) puts six people out of work ... for my crew."

Briand said he has worked in "all kinds" of fisheries over the years and "seen a lot of ups and downs" in the industry.

"But this is a pretty big downer, this one. Except for the (closure of) the cod fishery back in the day, this is a real downer for us. In my family, six people (are affected). Pretty much my whole family."

Briand said the lobster and snow crab industries will also be impacted, since "100 per cent" of what Cathy Earlene Fisheries caught was used for bait in lobster and crab traps.

"(Frozen mackerel is) going to run out," said Briand. "I don't know what they're going to use for bait but yes, the bait is going to be a hot commodity (moving forward)."

Jordan MacDougall, president of the Inverness South Fisherman's Association, said

the move will “financially hurt fishermen that are involved in those species, for sure.”

“There’s a big herring fleet in Nova Scotia that depends on the herring for income, as part of their businesses,” said MacDougall.

He said the announcement was “a bit of a surprise,” and that they were expecting reductions in total allowable catch rather than “total closure.”

“Usually there’s not many that are 100 per cent dependent on bait for their fishery, or the herring – it’s part of their income,” said MacDougall. “But it will hurt that.”

MacDougall said some of the ripple effects from this movement will be a reduction in jobs for those helping fishers.

JOB LOSSES “It will have a negative effect on income for people like unloaders, processors of plants, workers in the plants, there’ll be less work for them,” he said. “... It’s a domino effect through the industry, and then there’s truckers that won’t be moving the product.

“That’s what ends up hap-pening. Up in this area, the mackerel was used in our snow crab industry, in area 19, quite a bit. That’ll be gone now and it’ll have to be replaced by product from another country, probably.”

What frozen inventory the bait suppliers have from last year will be used up, and then bait will likely be imported from the west coast or from other countries, said MacDougall. This will “abso-lutely” increase costs.

“We might save a few dollars by purchasing it in bulk, but overall it’ll be more expensive,” said MacDougall. “Not good news. But it’s not completely unexpected.

The stock situation, we’ve known, has been in decline.”

He believes it will be “a few years” before stocks are replenished.

For Ray Briand, a commercial fisher in Dingwall and president of the North of Smokey Fishermen’s Association, the decision was “shocking.”

‘NO WARNING’ “There is quite a few fishermen that rely on the mackerel fishery for a substantial income,” said Briand, who is the first cousin of Pat. “They fish the bait fish once crabbing starts, for crab bait. ... So for (Minister of Fisheries Joyce Murray) to come out with (this), really she gave us no warning.”

Ray said a 50 per cent decrease in total allowable catch to keep the fishery open is what was agreed to at an advisory meeting he sat in on a month ago.

“We all voted positively for that. We didn’t want it but it was what it was to keep it open,” he said. “... She must’ve just decided herself she was closing (the fishery).”

He found out about the closure on Wednesday at 2 p.m., when fishery organizations were alerted just before the announcement.

“I mean we have we have bait in the freezer for now, but after this year ... what do we do next year? I mean ... it’s not only the mackerel fishers it’s affecting. It’s going to be the whole industry.

He said fishers don’t know what will happen moving forward.

“Where do we look to supply ourselves for income? I don’t know how this is gonna play out. ... It’s just heartbreaking.”

ENVIRONMENT REPORTER jessica.smith@cbpost.com @CBPost_Jessica

Caption:

There won't be a mackerel fishery in Atlantic Canada this year or a spring herring fishery in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, Fisheries and Oceans Minister Joyce Murray announced Wednesday. CONTRIBUTED

Commercial fisher Ray Briand of Dingwall, president of the North of Smokey Fishermen's Association: "We have bait in the freezer for now. But after this year, ... what do we do next year?" CONTRIBUTED

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