

PEI

Fishermen frustrated after DFO extends gulf herring moratorium by 2 years

'When a species is in a moratorium ... a lot less science gets done'

[Stephen Brun](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 03, 2025 5:00 AM EST | Last Updated: March 3



Herring plays a vital role in both the fishing industry and ocean ecosystems. It's an important food source for other species and a traditional source of bait in many commercial fisheries. (Radio-Canada)



18 comments

Scientists say there are no signs that the Atlantic herring stock is improving, but some fishermen aren't convinced.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada placed a moratorium on herring fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 2022, saying urgent action had to be taken to give the stocks a chance to recover.

Three years later, DFO said that recovery hasn't happened, prompting the agency to keep the fishery closed through 2026.

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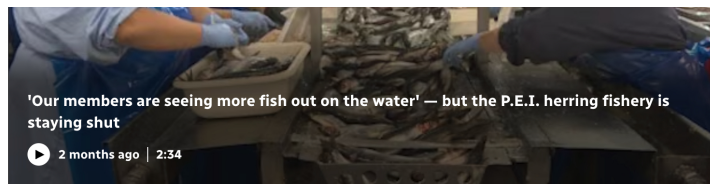
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"The stock status is currently very much like it was the past few years," said Jacob Burbank, a research scientist with DFO. "The stock is still in the critical zone, and it has been in the critical zone since the early 2000s."





The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans placed a moratorium on herring fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence back in 2022. At the time, the department said urgent action had to be taken to give the stocks a chance to recover. But three years later, scientists say they're seeing no improvement, though some P.E.I. fishing crews hold a different view. Wayne Thibodeau reports.

Several factors could be to blame, said Burbank, like warming waters and a reduction in the amount of available foods like zooplankton. The herring also aren't growing as large, and they're producing fewer eggs.

Herring plays a vital role in both the fishing industry and ocean ecosystems. It's an important food source for other species, including tuna and Atlantic cod.

They are also a traditional source of bait in many commercial fisheries, including lobster, snow crab and halibut.

“There's no win anywhere if the stock's not protected and taken care of, so we're all on that page.”

— Ian MacPherson, P.E.I. Fishermen's Association

The extension of the moratorium has left harvesters to rely on other sources of bait like mackerel, redfish and some manufactured products.

But those often come at a higher cost, said Ian MacPherson, the executive director of the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association.

The industry on the Island is disappointed with the decision to extend the moratorium, he said.



Ian MacPherson, executive director of the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association, says his group proposed working with DFO on a scientific herring fishery, but the agency didn't bite. (Shane Hennessey/CBC)

"There's no win anywhere if the stock's not protected and taken care of, so we're all on that page," MacPherson said.

"One of the things that tends to happen, though, when a species is in a moratorium is a lot less science gets done. So there could be positive changes out there that aren't getting picked up."

He said, anecdotally, fishermen have been seeing more herring when they're out on the water.

'Things aren't looking favourable'

The association had hoped to partner with DFO on what's known as a scientific fishery, where fishermen collect a reduced catch of herring and report back on the stock's health to scientists.

MacPherson said that proposal wasn't considered for 2025 or 2026.

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DFO estimated the herring stock to be around 28,000 tonnes in 2023. Burbank said the critical zone for the species is considered to be anything below 52,000 tonnes.

He said numbers for 2024 and 2025 won't be presented until next year, but that there's not much optimism for a rebound.

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openness for a resume.

"If environmental conditions stay unfavourable as they currently are projected to, then we can't expect the ... number of young [herring] surviving to improve and it'll just cascade through the stock," he said.

"Things aren't looking favourable."

Corrections

- A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that numbers for 2024 and 2025 wouldn't be presented next year. The story has been updated.
Mar 03, 2025 10:09 AM EST

With files from Wayne Thibodeau, Laura Chapin and Jackie Sharkey

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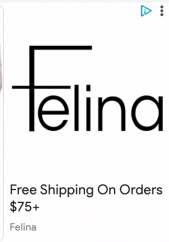
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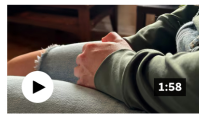
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