

British Columbia · Video

Thousands of dead herring dumped off coast of Vancouver Island, conservationists say

'The sadness to us is that there's a loss of those potential fish in the future,' says Grant Scott

Yvette Brend · CBC News · Posted: Mar 22, 2021 4:06 PM EDT | Last Updated: March 22, 2021



The Hornby Island Conservancy says they got an anonymous tip that a fishing vessel had dumped its load of herring in Deep Bay. (Hornby Island Conservancy)

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A conservation group that's long opposed the B.C. herring fishery says it suspects a fishing vessel has dumped a load of the small fish in Deep Bay, near Bowser on Vancouver Island.

Members of the Hornby Island Conservancy say they got an anonymous tip on Friday that a commercial fishing vessel had dumped its load of netted herring after a packing vessel had refused its catch.

The conservationists say they sent a diver down to gather video footage and they are now sharing images of dead fish, which appear to be herring, littering the sea floor.

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Grant Scott, who works with the conservation group, estimates the dump could include as many as 45,000 fish, depending on how big the fishing vessel was that allegedly dumped the load.

But whatever the loss, he says, it's a shame.

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Conservancy Hornby Island members say as many as 45,000 fish were dumped by a fishing vessel in Deep Bay, near Bowser, B.C.

"These fish could have gone out and spawned six, seven or eight times more. Every herring female spawns 20,000 eggs. That's the sadness to us, is that there's a loss of those potential fish in the future. It's a waste," said Scott.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans said it is aware of the alleged dumping incident in Deep Bay and fishery officers are investigating as commercial fishers are prohibited from dumping any catch from a vessel.

"DFO is committed to managing Pacific herring fisheries to ensure that there are enough herring to spawn and sustain the stock into the future and support the species' role in the ecosystem," the department said in a statement.

Scott believes DFO will be checking video from dock cameras to try to determine which vessel or vessels may have been involved in the alleged fish dump.



Fishing boats working the Strait of Georgia herring fishery in 2018. (CHEK News)

The spring herring fishery has long been a source of tension with concerns about over-fishing straining already fragile herring stocks in B.C. and other parts of Canada.

Last week there was a renewed call for a herring fishery moratorium by a coalition of First Nations leaders, the Tla'amin and WSANEC Leadership Council, backed by 53 municipalities, MP Gord Johns and 160,000 petitioners.

Conservationists say DFO estimates show the Pacific herring population dwindling to 60 per cent of previous levels, between 2016 and 2020.

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The Strait of Georgia is the only zone off B.C. shores right now able to support a commercial herring roe fishery, according to DFO.

In spring, adult herring gather in such mass numbers to spawn on B.C.'s coastal shores that the males' milt turns the water light green. Females lay their sticky eggs on seaweed and rough rocks. The small fish are food for everything from sea birds to salmon — and some orcas, marine mammals and whales.

Herring products such as roe are sold in Japan, where it's considered a delicacy, and also in some smaller markets in China and the U.S.

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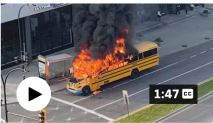
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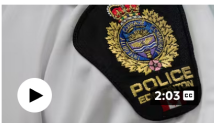
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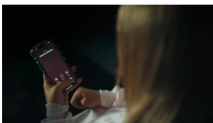
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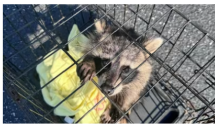
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