

CLOSURE WITHOUT CAUSE: Reopen the Atlantic Mackerel Fishery

Minister Joyce Murray closed the Atlantic Mackerel fishery in 2022 because DFO Science argues the stock has declined. But fish harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador have seen a larger abundance of Atlantic Mackerel around the province than they've seen in decades – or in many cases ever before.

DFO Science has it wrong and their narrow-minded focus on their assessment model has far wider implications than their cubicle in White Hills or on Parliament Hill. They repeatedly drop the ball on fundamental science assessments and surveys, and they refuse to meaningfully incorporate harvester observations and knowledge into the assessment process. Harvesters have presented their observations and reasoning at assessment and management meetings, but DFO does not acknowledge that these observations are valid or admit that the mountains of collected evidence challenge DFO's assessment of Atlantic mackerel.

This is not the first time we've raised the issue with DFO – senior staff within the department are very well-versed on the Atlantic Mackerel fishery. Our own in-house science department took steps to survey fish harvesters throughout the province and coordinated on-the-water sampling on several occasions. This robust collection of evidence has been all but ignored by DFO.

Shutting down the Atlantic Mackerel fishery without just cause was a slap in the face to professional fish harvesters, to plant workers and other fishery workers, and to coastal communities not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but in other Canadian maritime provinces.

It's one thing down to shut a fishery down when it's not doing well. While it can be hard to swallow, harvesters acknowledge it must be done and are often the ones raising the alarm before DFO Science, as was the case back with northern cod. But the Atlantic Mackerel fishery was closed in 2022 while folks witnessed enormous abundance with wide distribution and year classes, and there are even dozens of reports of mackerel sightings through the fall into January and February. **These observations are entirely contradictory to DFO Science's narrative that the stock is failing.**

Fish harvesters in NL have been seeing year-over-year increases in mackerel for the past several years, all while DFO models show that the stock has continued to decline. Yet year-after-year, DFO sits like toddlers with their fingers in their ears and their eyes scrunched closed, stuck on the idea that what *hundreds* of fish harvesters are seeing is simply wrong.

Minister Joyce Murray must look at all the facts. She must listen to the thousands of people who spend their lives on the water. People whose observations, knowledge, history and contributions hold meaning and value. More than that, Minister Murray must look at the evidence and the science that goes beyond DFO's limited focus.

DFO claims to value fishers' knowledge in the assessment process. Now is their time to prove it. The Atlantic Mackerel fishery must be reopened this year. Last year's closure was already an enormous economic loss to our communities. The Atlantic Mackerel fishery has never been so abundant and healthy and reopening the fishery in 2023 is the only decision fish harvesters will accept.

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