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GREG PRETTY
President

JASON SPINGLE
Secretary-Treasurer

April 5, 2024

Honourable Gerry Byrne
Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills
Main Floor, East Block Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Minister Byrne,

As you know, the anomalies in the unemployment rate at the end of the seasonal fishery in 2023 had drastic impacts on Employment Insurance for fish plant workers. We write with great urgency and concern as the impacts of the divisor dropping abruptly at the end of the fishing season with no opportunities to meet new eligibility requirements continue to do great harm to these workers.

Claimants received up to \$400 less in benefits during the difficult winter months, and their claim was to run out 4 to 6 weeks before the 2024 working season. Further, in households where the two income earners are seasonal workers, this loss is compounded to \$800 less a month, with the same stretch of no income until the working season begins.

The extension of Service Canada's pilot program for seasonal workers announced in the federal fall economic statement did nothing to increase the benefit amount for these workers, it just prolonged the benefit period. Regardless, most seafood processing plant workers were not eligible for this extension, and the benefits for most of these workers have run out as of early March.

On February 23, 2024, FFAW leadership, including two Crab Plant Chairs, attended an in-person meeting with the federal NL Liberal Caucus. It was stated explicitly by Minister Gudie Hutchings during this meeting that federal government had given the province a pocket of funding that she suggested we approach your department for in this capacity. Acknowledging that Employment Insurance lays on federal land, FFAW has remained in contact with senior officials at the ESDC to try and expedite interim solutions as the complex undertaking of EI reform continues, but the disconnect between Parliament and the realities of seasonal workers and coastal communities has suspended any meaningful progress.

While our Union is working very hard to ensure an orderly and timely fishery in 2024, many processing plant workers have been without income for almost 4-weeks, (an income loss that cannot be recovered),

and have no other choice but to avail on social assistance – thereby downloading the inadequacies of a federal system onto the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The following reflects an approximate (and growing) number of workers in unionized plants that have reported to FFAW Member Representatives that they are acutely affected by this growing income gap:

Barry Group Witless Bay - 47 workers
Ocean Choice International Bonavista - 58 workers
Ocean Choice International Triton - 30 workers
Happy Adventure Seafoods – 30 workers
Notre-Dame Seafoods - 22 workers

Additionally, there are approximately 15 dockside monitors employed through the Fisherman's Resource Centre that are impacted.

For clarity, we are seeking programming that will allow these plant workers to receive economic support to stabilize the workforce and promote retention to prevent people from experiencing poverty. FFAW has consistently approached provincial government on this issue for the past several months and, assuredly, it has only exacerbated without intervention.

We request an immediate discussion with the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills to explore programming or opportunities available that would meet the needs of these workers and achieve the commitment given by the province in Spring 2023 that these workers would receive protections. We will provide firm numbers of impacted numbers to refine the scope of funding and work in collaboration to meet any required criteria for such funding to be distributed appropriately and effectively.

Please confirm your earliest availability for this urgent discussion.

Sincerely,



Signed by Greg Pretty (2024/04/05)
Verify with verifio.com or Adobe Reader.

Greg Pretty
President, FFAW-Unifor

CC: Ken Carter, Director of Policy, Executive Council
Minister Bernard Davis, Minister of Labour
Honourable Gudie Hutchings, Minister of Rural Economic Development Canada
Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour Canada
Churence Rogers, MP for Bonavista—Burin—Trinity
Ken McDonald, MP for Avalon
Yvonne Jones, MP for Labrador
Joanne Thompson, MP for St. John's East
Clifford Small, MP for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame
