

**Remarks for the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
Study of the Impacts of the Reopening of the Cod Fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador and
Quebec**

**DWAN STREET, FFAW-Unifor Inshore Member Representative for Area 3Ps; President-Elect
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Mr. Chair, honourable members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today regarding the Northern cod commercial fishery.

I am here today representing over 13,000 commercial fish harvesters and processing plant workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. I thank the Committee for highlighting the urgent nature of the Northern cod decision, and the fact that the June decision made by the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Minister Diane Lebouthillier, threatens the continued rebuilding of our historic cod stock and the continued economic sustainability of coastal Newfoundland and Labrador.

For over 500 years, Northern cod has been the lifeblood of coastal communities in our province, and our Union is deeply invested in the sustainable management and future viability of this critical resource.

Since the moratorium in 1992, our members have worked tirelessly as stewards of the Northern cod stock. Through collaborative science initiatives, a commitment to sustainable fishing practices, and participation in the Stewardship fishery, we have seen the spawning stock biomass grow from less than 10,000 tonnes to nearly 400,000 tonnes today - a remarkable 40-fold increase.

This growth allowed the stock to move from the critical to the cautious zone in 2024. While this is certainly positive news, we must not repeat the mistakes of the past. The decision to reopen a commercial fishery with a 6% allocation to offshore dragnets is deeply concerning and threatens to undermine decades of rebuilding efforts.

Let me be clear - FFAW-Unifor vehemently opposes any offshore trawling activity on the 2J3KL cod stock. Targeting dense pre-spawning and spawning aggregations during winter months poses an unacceptable risk to the continued recovery of Northern cod.

Our position on access and allocation remains unchanged. We stand firm in our conviction that the first 115,000 tonnes of Northern cod quota must be exclusively allocated to the inshore sector and Indigenous groups in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is not merely our position, but a longstanding commitment of the federal government, as evidenced in the briefing note provided to your honourable members.

This commitment dates to the late 1970s and has been consistently upheld by successive governments. It recognizes the critical importance of the Northern cod fishery to our coastal communities and the inshore fleet's reliance on this

adjacent resource. The 115,000t commitment also recognizes the crisis that resulted from the moratorium, the voices of inshore harvesters that were ignored in the years leading to the collapse, and the hundreds of communities in our province that were left irreparably devastated by the consequences.

The inshore sector has demonstrated tremendous capacity to harvest Northern cod sustainably. In 2023, our members landed 70% of the 12,999-tonne Maximum Allowable Harvest in just four weeks. This was achieved while adhering to stringent conservation measures and weekly landing limits.

From 2023 to 2024, the total allowable catch for Northern cod increased by 6,000t, yet inshore harvesters received just 2,000 t of this increase. These are the same harvesters that acted as stewards of this resource for the last 32 years. To see the status of Northern cod move from the critical to the cautious zone and the result of their hard work and dedication being a return to a dragger fishery, well it's a slap in the face to the inshore harvesters, plant workers, and, a symbol of great disconnect between sitting government and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Introducing new offshore capacity is both unnecessary and harmful to the economic sustainability of our owner-operator fleet and land-based processing workers. This season, we harvested 75% of the inshore allocation in just four weeks. Our harvesters have the capacity to land a significant volume of high-quality fish, providing frozen product year-round without targeting vulnerable spawning aggregations.

We urge this Committee to recognize the economic importance of the inshore Northern cod fishery to rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Owner-operator harvesters are genuine stewards of the resource, and they take the long-term sustainability of their fishery very seriously having lived through the moratorium. They have invested heavily in sustainable gear, quality handling techniques, and participated in a Fishery Improvement Project that recently received an "A" rating from international NGOs.

As we look to the future, we call on the government to take several critical actions:

- Immediately revert the management plan for 2J3KL Northern cod to a Stewardship Fishery model and rescind access of domestic and international offshore dragger fleets.
- Uphold the 115,000-tonne commitment for exclusive priority allocation to Newfoundland and Labrador inshore harvesters and Indigenous groups until which time the stock has sufficiently rebuild, and
- Formalize a system of harvester participation and input into all aspects of fisheries management for Northern cod.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the decisions made regarding Northern cod management will have far-reaching implications for coastal Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our communities, which have existed for centuries because of the fishery, are counting on responsible, sustainable management of this resource.

The future of Northern cod is inextricably linked to the future of our coastal communities. We urge this Committee to recommend management measures that recognize this reality and support the long-term sustainability of both the resource and the people who depend on it.

We have learned hard lessons from the 1992 collapse of Northern cod. Now is the time to apply those lessons, prioritize the adjacent inshore fleet, and ensure that the benefits of stock recovery flow to those who most depend on the resource.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of our past.

We cannot let the voices of fish harvesters be ignored all over again.

Thank you for your time.