

## **E-log Issues**

Beginning in 2023, e-logs were available to use on a voluntary basis in the crab and lobster fisheries in NL. That year, nine harvesters submitted e-logs; in 2024, just 10 harvesters used e-logs for those fisheries. E-logs became mandatory this year in the Unit I redfish fishery. In November 2024, DFO announced that e-logs will become mandatory in select NL fisheries in 2025: the Full Time and midshore crab fleet and all lobster fisheries.

On Dec 6, 2024, DFO met with FFAW staff and Inshore Council to talk about mandatory implementation of e-logs and address the many issues and concerns felt by harvesters. While many of the questions from harvesters were addressed at this meeting, some remain outstanding. In general, harvesters feel that the shift towards e-logs is rushed, especially given there are serious questions left unanswered, such as the completion of e-logs should a harvester be boarded at-sea by a fishery officer, and whether e-logs can be on the device of designated skippers/multiple skippers.

There is also a sense that DFO is downloading the work of paid government staff on to harvesters. The department will certainly see a reduction in data entry staff through the introduction of e-logs, yet harvesters must pay to use these mandatory apps.

Further, the demographic of this industry is clear: we have a significant number of older harvesters, many of whom are either not comfortable with technology like smart phones or tablets, or do not use and will never use those devices. Many harvesters in this province use flip phones and do not use computers. While they may rely on a spouse, friend, neighbour, town clerk, etc. to help with the National Online Licensing System (NOLS) to get their license conditions at the beginning of the year, they cannot rely on that individual to enter their daily landings aboard the boat for several months during the fishing season.

Another concern raised by harvesters is the lack of experience or familiarity with e-logs among dockside monitors and fishery officers. There also was a lack of clarity on enforcement, and any fines that might be levied in situations such as where a harvester had a fully completed paper log, but no e-log. Harvesters also had privacy concerns. For example, would a fishery officer confiscate a smart phone during an investigation. A tremendous amount of personal information is contained on phones. While we understand that fishery officers have been helpful during the mandatory implementation of e-logs in the redfish fishery, that fishery has less than a dozen boats on the water and landing at any given time. Help from fishery officers will become more difficult with hundreds or thousands of vessels using e-logs.

Connectivity was another concern. Many areas of NL have minimal connectivity (wi-fi or cell), even within a community. Even though harvesters may have a 72-hour period to submit their log, they could be fishing for a week or more in a low/no connectivity area of the province. This is particularly true for lobster harvesters on the south and west coasts of the island who often fish from remote camps.

During a recent fleet meeting, we heard from a redfish harvester that it is not possible to enter activity for a previous date. It will be impossible for some harvesters, particularly those who are relying on a spouse, neighbour, or friend, to enter this data for them.

Cost is also a concern. There were no costs associated with paper logs, but harvesters will be forced to spend, at minimum, \$60 per season per species for an e-log. With e-logs becoming mandatory it is feared that companies could increase the fee. There is also the cost associated with paying for a phone or tablet capable of running the app. Some harvesters are in the position of still using flip phones or sharing a cell phone with a partner, which would require buying a phone specifically for fishing. This is yet another cost to be borne by harvesters who are already paying an exorbitant amount of money for gear, bait, fuel, and other fishing necessities.

The requirement of phones and other electronic devices can also become an issue when fishing. In the lobster fishery specifically, most harvesters are fishing from speedboats, which makes entering data into an e-log difficult. Although it may be possible to enter the data under ideal environmental conditions, these conditions are rare. And even during these best-case weather scenarios, harvesters' hands will be dirty/slimy from fishing and cutting up bait, making data entry difficult and the risk of ruining the device high. There is also the potential to lose the expensive device overboard.

### **A Solution**

Realistically, there are a certain number of harvesters that will adopt e-logs with little to no hesitation. Then there are a large group of harvesters who will need assistance to get into using e-logs, whether that is hands-on training sessions with fellow harvesters, a submission period where they have a spouse or friend guide them through the entry at home, etc. And finally, there are a number of harvesters who will never use e-logs, and they could leave the industry prematurely if this is forced on them in an unrealistic manner.

We are proposing that 2025 be treated as an implementation year, where harvesters that are ready to adopt e-logs are encouraged to do so by a \$60 savings on their licensing fee for the species for which they are using an e-log.

For that large group of harvesters that are hesitant to use e-logs, we will select five harvesters per Lobster Fishing Area (LFA) to complete an e-log for the season. They will receive training prior to the start of the season and support during the season in completing their e-log. Through regular contact with Union staff, they will document what works well, what are the difficulties, etc. This can be beneficial feedback for the department, as well as for the service provider. During fall 2025 and winter 2026, the harvesters that participated in the program will attend fleet meetings and relay their experiences to fellow fish harvesters.



**FFAW | UNIFOR**  
Fish, Food & Allied Workers

PO Box 10, Station C  
368 Hamilton Avenue, 2nd Floor  
St. John's NL A1C 5H5

Tel: 709.576.7276  
Fax: 709.576.1962  
Web: [www.ffaw.nf.ca](http://www.ffaw.nf.ca)

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DWAN STREET  
*President*

JASON SPINGLE  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

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For harvesters who decide to complete e-logs this year and those who participate in the program, we request that they be given 72 hours to enter daily activity in the e-log.

All other harvesters would continue to submit paper logs in 2025.

Looking beyond 2025, for the harvesters who have no capability to complete e-logs, we request that they continue to be permitted to submit paper logs. Many of these are older harvesters who will be exiting the industry in five to ten years and mandating e-logs on these people at this point in their careers create unnecessary stress. There are harvesters with no internet service at home, either because it simply does not exist in their area or for other reasons.

In recent years, the department has put extra resources into getting logbooks returned. Forcing e-logs could result in a lower rate of returns. Working with the industry on an implementation plan for e-logs is a way to help transition as many harvesters as is reasonably possible to this new technology and maintain or even improve logbook submission rates.