



Fishing Industry New Entrants Initiative



FFAW | UNIFOR
Fish, Food & Allied Workers



MEDIA RELEASE

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ST. JOHN'S, NL – The Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) along with project partners the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board (PFHCB) and the Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvester Safety Association (NL-FHSA) are thrilled to announce the launch of the Fishing Industry New Entrants Initiative (FINEI). Funded through the provincial government's Labour Market Partnerships Program, FINEI aims to address the growing need for recruitment and retention of owner-operators and crew members in the inshore fishing industry.

Newfoundland and Labrador's inshore fishery is facing significant demographic challenges. Approximately one-third of certified fish harvesters are over the age of 54, with many expected to retire within the next decade. Without a steady influx of new entrants, many fishing enterprises may face succession challenges, potentially affecting seafood production, employment opportunities, and the sustainability of coastal communities that depend on the fishery.

"The funding comes a pivotal time when our inshore fishery is facing serious demographic challenges due to an aging workforce. The government's investment in this project is a strong signal that they're committed to protecting our fishery for the future," says FFAW-Unifor President Dwan Street. "With project funding exceeding \$1.2 million, the provincial government's investment will allow for significantly increased engagement with secondary schools, trade schools, and new Canadian associations."

FFAW-Unifor's Young Harvesters Committee, established in late 2025, will help oversee the project alongside a governance committee and a dedicated project coordinator.

"A career in the fishery offers more than just a job. It's an opportunity to be part of an industry that feeds the world while making the ocean your workplace," says Alicia Warford, fish harvester from Petty Harbour and Young Harvester Committee member. "With the ocean as your workplace no two days are the same, each with its own challenges and opportunities. Some of the most valuable lessons I have learned over the years have been learned on the deck of a boat."

Informed by a comprehensive Labour Market Assessment and with input from the Young Harvesters Committee, FINEI will establish a New Harvesters Network for the province and hold annual in-person Summits for the life of the 3-year project. The project also includes a multimedia marketing campaign. The FINEI project will educate folks on the benefits of a career in the fishery, such as freedom to be your own boss, to enjoy the outdoors, and to bring home a good income.

"The fishery has long been the cornerstone of communities throughout the province, and ensuring its future depends on attracting and supporting the next generation of harvesters," says Mark Dolomount, Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board executive director. "This initiative is an important and much-needed step in promoting the fishing industry as a viable and rewarding career path, while also helping address the labour and succession challenges facing the sector today."

Through collaboration with NL-FHSA, prospects will also be educated on ocean safety, training opportunities, equipment, and programming. Craig Parsons, executive director, says, "the NL-FHSA is proud to be partnered with a project that provides new entrants with specialized training designed to address the unique challenges and needs of the fish harvesting industry." He mentioned the vitality of new entrants to shaping the industry's future safety culture, building a stronger, safer workforce for generations to come.

"The inshore fishery remains the backbone of coastal economies throughout our province. It's an opportunity to keep young people in their communities and to build a sustainable future for the next generation," concludes Street.

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The Fishing Industry New Entrants Initiative (FINEI) aims to attract young people to a career in the inshore commercial fishery as the industry faces an aging workforce. With provincial seafood landings exceeding \$1.3 billion in 2025, the fishing industry remains one of Newfoundland and Labrador's most important economic drivers and offers visible, rewarding careers for those interested in life and work in coastal communities.

Funded by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Labour Market Partnerships Program, FINEI includes a comprehensive outreach strategy that will engage secondary school students, newcomers, and skilled trades workers throughout the province.

Delivered by FFAW-Unifor in partnership with the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board (PFHCB) and the NL Harvesting Safety Association (NL-FHSA), the initiative allocates \$1.2 million over 3 years to support efforts to recruit and retain both crew members and owner-operators to fill over 3,000 expected openings over the next decade.



Over the next three years, FINEI will help introduce more people to careers in Newfoundland and Labrador's inshore fishery and connect interested participants with the information and supports they need to get started. The initiative will help more people understand the career opportunities available in the inshore fishery and support the next generation of fish harvesters and owner-operators.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's **Labour Market Partnerships Program** offers funding to help employers, associations, community groups, and communities develop and implement strategies to address labour market challenges and meet human resource needs.

\$ 1.2 million
3 years

Approximately **2,289 job openings** for fishing vessel masters and crew are expected between 2023 and 2032, according to projections from the NL Department of Finance.

Outside of St. John's, research shows about 55 young people entering the labour force for every 100 retirees. Labour demand is being driven by the estimated retirements and attritions of workers, alongside the rising international demand for wild seafood products.

With the increasing need to address labour market challenges, FINEI supports recruitment and retention in the harvesting sector, with the goal of seeing an **increase in registration over a three-year period.**



LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

For many, transportation, housing, and funding access have been identified as barriers to enrolment in the industry. The project will address these barriers by supplying interested participants with information on how to achieve goals with these factors in mind. FINEI will provide prospective entrants with **information, guidance, and community connections** to assist in navigating these barriers. Other challenges in remote communities include access to information, which the project aims to address through physical handouts like pamphlets, posters, letters, and other media.

Objectives

- Increase awareness of what the inshore fishery provides for rural communities through in-person engagement and marketing campaigns
- Provide prospects with information, materials, and resources needed to plan a viable and rewarding career in the fishery;
- Connect interested youth with fish harvesters, owner-operators, and other industry workers
- Partner with immigration and provincial newcomer services to engage newcomers with experience or interest working at-sea
- Participate in career fairs, trade shows, community outreach, and conferences across Newfoundland and Labrador
- Increase participation in recruitment events



The inshore fishery is a cornerstone to Newfoundland and Labrador’s economy and cultural identity. The industry supports thousands of direct and indirect jobs in harvesting, processing, and shipping, and tourism. FINEI aims to ensure the **long-term economic sustainability of rural coastal communities** by encouraging a continuous influx of new and young harvesters.

The establishment of a Newfoundland and Labrador New Harvesters Network and annual in-person Summit will lay the groundwork needed for an evergreen initiative that will be maintained by project partners after funding ends.

The project’s purpose is to keep the value and benefits of adjacent resources in the hands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through the owner-operator, inshore fishery.

FINEI’s success will be tracked through school visits, outreach events, participant engagement, distributed materials, digital campaign results, certification growth, and feedback from participants and stakeholders.

With FINEI, FFAW-Unifor is committed to the long-term economic sustainability of the inshore fishery and coastal communities.



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