

REGROUPEMENT DES PÊCHEURS PROFESSIONNELS DU SUD DE LA GASPÉSIE

NEWS RELEASE

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BY ITS DECISION NOT TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO THE GASPÉ LOBSTER FISHERS' RESTRUCTURING PROGRAM, FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA IS JEOPARDIZING THE LOBSTER FISHERY, THE NEXT GENERATION OF FISHERS AND THE GASPÉ REGION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Administrators of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie have criticized the attitude of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Quebec Region, toward the difficult mission the organization announced in 2002 of restructuring the lobster fishery. The regional group representing most Gaspé-area lobster fishers set up an internal licence buy-back program to reduce the fishing effort (82 percent), considered too high by the Department's science sector. Since that time, seven licences have been bought back, while the target initially set by the Minister of the day (Thibeault) was 30.

The meagre temporary snow crab allocations given each year to Gaspé lobster fishers are used solely to build up the largest possible fund for licence buy-backs. "The problem," explains the group's executive director, O'neil Cloutier, "is that the Department allocates insufficient quantities of snow crab for us to accelerate the buy-back program."

Fishers are doing everything they can to participate in the process to reduce the fishing effort. In 2005, for example, two licences were bought back in two different sub-areas of the Gaspé region. The remaining fishers in the sub-areas in question contributed financially to the buy-back by injecting capital equivalent to one third of the amounts sought by the vendors. The group's buy-back fund provided the other two thirds.

At a workshop last November on reducing the fishing effort, the Department's science and management sectors as well as 40 participating fishers set a short-term target of reducing the fishing effort by 15 percent. To achieve this, the Gaspé-area lobster fishers agreed, starting in 2006, to reduce the number of traps allowed to 235 and to remove two days from the fishing season. These two measures will reduce the fishers' income but contribute to an 8.6-percent reduction in the fishing effort. The remaining 6.2-percent reduction should come from the internal buy-back program. Each licence bought back reduces the fishing effort by 2 percent. To reach the short-term target would require the resources to buy back 12 licences quickly.

The findings of the economic study of cash flow (now available) conducted by the Department in 2005 for 2004 also confirm the decline in income of Gaspé-area fishers. Since 2003, income has plummeted 23 percent despite better lifelong performances posted for prices paid at the wharf. The inability of lobster fishers to diversify their fishing activity, as they did before the cod moratorium, contributed to an increase in the fishing effort for lobster, to maintain income at the same level.

Since 2002, Gaspé-area lobster fishers have been demanding better support from DFO in the temporary snow crab allocations program. Despite current high levels in the temporary allocations and excellent performances by the group's administrators in managing the rationalization fund, the Department has continued to favour other fleets. "Apparently the situation is not as urgent, since in 2006, the allocation will support the buy-back of only one licence," Mr. Cloutier notes.

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