

Speaking Notes

for

**The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc P.C., Q.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the
Canadian Coast Guard**

**At a Meeting of the
Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters' Federation**

**Chester, NOVA SCOTIA
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Hello and thank you for that warm welcome. Great to be in Chester, Nova Scotia this afternoon.

As I look around this room, I can't help but admire the leadership that the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters' Federation brings to national issues, advocating on behalf of your 31,000 members who harvest most of this country's plentiful seafood, fish.

Les chiffres sont éloquentes. Les diverses associations qui composent la Fédération génèrent plus de 1,4 milliard de dollars en valeur au débarquement, et des milliards de dollars d'exportations.

Vous procurez 30 000 emplois directs aux membres d'équipage, et des milliers d'autres emplois indirects dans bien des domaines, allant de la construction navale et de la transformation du poisson au transport et à bien d'autres secteurs, dans vos collectivités et au-delà.

When my father had my job, he took tremendous pride in being called the "fishermen's minister," and during his tenure he accomplished many things. In fact, he was the first Minister in this portfolio to advocate for oceans to be included in his mandate, and in the title of our Department.

That is why I am so proud to be a part of a government that is making meaningful investments in our oceans and in the work we do here and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Last year, our government announced the Oceans Protection Plan, a historic \$1.5-billion investment that will help preserve and restore marine ecosystems that are vulnerable to increased shipping and economic development. This unprecedented investment will allow us to create a world-leading marine-safety system with prevention and response measures that will better protect our waters and coasts and make our oceans a safer place for fishers like you and others who navigate our magnificent waters.

Under the Oceans Protection Plan, we will be taking a more coordinated and strategic approach to co-managing our oceans. This means we'll be able to protect our oceans in a way that ensures environmental sustainability, safe and responsible commercial use, and collaboration with coastal and Indigenous communities.

Both the Oceans Protection Plan and federal Budget 2016 also included major investments in aquatic science.

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We have used this funding to launch the largest science recruitment campaign in decades. We are hiring more than 135 federal scientists, biologists and technicians in DFO regions across the country. Most have already started work, and many are working right here in Atlantic Canada. I have had the privilege of meeting many of these remarkable women and men as I travel the country.

Nous savons que les océans et les écosystèmes du monde font face à de nombreux agents de stress, notamment la surpêche, la perte et la destruction d'habitats, la pollution marine et le réchauffement de la température de la mer.

Ces scientifiques effectuent les activités de recherche et de surveillance qui orientent nos efforts relatifs à la gestion des pêches, aux espèces en péril et au changement climatique. Ils nous aident à faire augmenter la superficie des zones marines et côtières canadiennes protégées à 5 % cette année, puis à 10 % d'ici 2020.

Our government knows that the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Canadians in coastal communities depend on our oceans. As we work to open up new international markets for our fish and seafood sector—and I know we will, given this region's reputation for world-class products—our continued investments in science and research will help us better understand the marine environment we are working in.

In addition, in partnership with Atlantic provinces under the Atlantic Growth Strategy, we're investing \$325 million new dollars to promote growth and innovation in the Atlantic region.

It's an exciting time to be at Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and I salute the great work of our Deputy Minister and my departmental colleagues who are here with me today.

As you well know, the capacity of DFO and the Coast Guard to provide important services to Canadians was hollowed out during the previous decade. Two separate operating reviews massively reduced our department's capacity in many key areas.

Our government wanted to make sure that DFO and the Coast Guard have the resources they need to continue to serve Canadians into the future. Over the last year and a half, we undertook an intensive comprehensive review process of all of our programs and services.

I'm pleased to report that, on top of the investments I just told you about, DFO and the Coast Guard will be receiving \$1.4 billion for core operations over the next five years. This is an investment into services that save lives, protect the marine environment, help

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manage our aquatic resources, contribute to our understanding of climate change, create jobs, and drive sustainable economic growth. I look forward to your advice on how this renewed Department can better serve your needs, and allow you to sustainably grow your business.

Like I said, it's an exciting time to be at DFO, and as your Minister I am honoured to have the opportunity to implement these new, combined investments of \$3 billion in a way that will best serve Canadians, including hard-working fish harvesters like you and those in the associations that you represent.

As Minister, my goal is to bring our government's support for the middle class to life through a progressive fisheries policy. Today I'll be speaking about our plans to strengthen owner-operator and fleet separation policies, and about how we want to hear from you about how we can make Canada's licensing regime fairer.

In many rural, coastal and Indigenous communities here in Atlantic Canada, the fish and seafood sector is a real economic driver. Often, the only significant economic activity in a community.

Some of your most popular exports—lobster, snow crab, shrimp and farmed Atlantic salmon—can be found on dinner plates in more than 130 countries around the world.

J'étais à Boston plus tôt cette année pour le salon annuel Seafood Expo d'Amérique du Nord – et je peux vous dire que non seulement le Canada y était bien représenté, mais que nous avons également de quoi être fiers.

L'année dernière, les exportations canadiennes de plus de 100 espèces de poissons et de fruits de mer ont augmenté de 10 %, atteignant un chiffre record de 6,6 milliards de dollars.

Ce sont les pêcheurs de cette région qui ont mené la danse. Avec des exportations représentant un total de 5 milliards de dollars en 2016, le Canada atlantique aide à exploiter la volonté farouche de la région de réussir.

I will continue to work hard on your behalf to open up new international markets—and to work with all of you to transform and modernize this industry so that Canada can play an increasingly important role in feeding a hungry planet with high-quality, sustainably sourced protein. Our government allocated \$30 million new dollars to support marketing and branding around the world

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We will also continue to work hard to ensure that the benefits of this high demand for the products you work hard to harvest stay where they belong, with you and your communities.

As I travel through the Atlantic provinces, I see how integral small-boat independent owner-operators are to our regional economies. I see this from my windows overlooking the Northumberland Strait.

You and the members of your organizations have been making your living from—or on—the sea for generations. It is a way of life that contributes to the economic and social fabric of this region, and our country.

In my discussions with individuals and with industry, I have heard how important it is to preserve the independence of our inshore and midshore fleets.

I am here today to tell you that I am committed to strengthening the Owner-Operator, Fleet Separation and the “Preserving the Independence of the Inshore Fleet in Canada's Atlantic Fisheries”—or PIIFCAF—policies.

These policies exist to ensure that inshore and midshore harvesters remain independent, and that the benefits of inshore and midshore fishing licenses flow to the fish harvesters who hold them and to the coastal communities that depend on the resource.

These policies are helping to generate stable and long-term economic prosperity in Atlantic Canada and they're helping the middle class thrive. They are supported by you as fish harvesters and were developed in partnership with you over decades.

I'm not only committed to the principles behind the owner-operator, fleet separation and PIIFCAF policies: I'm also determined to ensure that they can be and are enforced, so that the protections these policies offer on paper are a reality for you. I want to make sure that the goals of these policies align with what's actually happening on the water/on wharves, and that DFO is able to offer genuine protection to your way of life as independent fish harvesters.

In the past, DFO did not do enough to enforce these policies—unacceptable patchwork quilt across the regions developed where the Department was often willfully blind to what was happening.

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Now, I am aware that PIIFCAF and other inshore policies will not completely eliminate the issue of third parties trying to assert control over the inshore fisheries.

Fisheries policy is no different than any other policy area—when there are rules, there will be people trying to figure out how to circumvent them. Some fishers and companies devote inordinate amounts of resources working to get around the rules.

But we will continue to work harder to enforce the rules, not for the rules' sake, but because we believe in the principles on which they are based. I have instructed the Department to be much more effective in enforcing these rules.

My father delivered a speech in 1974 when he became Minister of State for Fisheries, in which he described how rare it was to see the fishery from the view of the fisherman.

QUOTE:

“How many of us would go to work in the morning without any idea of our pay? How many of us would put ourselves in the actual place of the fisherman, exchange our way of life for his? To the tourist, the fisherman seems free. And there may be freedom in his life, but on a rough ocean at four a.m., in the fog, with no sure knowledge of where the fish are or how to find them, there may also be desperation. The fisherman never knows what his catch will be. Or how good his family's Christmas will be.”

This passage comes back to me when I think about why we do what we do at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. This is why we need to work make sure that our policies have teeth—because although much has changed in the four decades since my father spoke those words, the fisherman's reality has not.

I am committed to making sure that the fruits of this labour remain where they should: with individual fish harvesters like you. With those who say goodbye to their families before dawn and spend their days at sea. With our coastal communities, home to those fishermen who make their living in difficult conditions and provide jobs and economic opportunity for their towns, villages, and neighbourhoods.

There have been court cases over the years challenging the Minister's authority to protect the independence and economic viability of the inshore and midshore fleets using licensing policy.

You will recall that our Government recently won the Kirby Elson case, and the court confirmed that the PIIFCAF policy is a relevant consideration that the Minister can take into account when making licensing decisions. Our victory, at trial, in this case re-affirms

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the authority of the fisheries minister to enforce the rules in place to ensure that the wealth and value flowing from our fisheries remain in their local communities.

We will continue to defend the fleet separation and owner-operator policies. DFO officials are continuing the targeted reviews that are currently underway to investigate potential controlling agreements, and bring to account any license holders who may be undermining the principles of PIIFCAF. I will be unyielding and relentless in pursuing, and holding to account, those who break these rules.

Again, let me be clear. I have directed the Department to enhance enforcement efforts, so that hard-working harvesters stay independent, and that they and their communities enjoy the economic benefits of their labour. Any efforts to circumvent the rules will be met with a robust response—and I have also directed the Department to provide me with a report every two weeks on renewed efforts to investigate and end the circumventions of our policies.

We have already begun exploring the potential for more fundamental changes that would help eliminate financial barriers to entry and ensure that the independence and economic viability of the inshore and midshore fisheries are maintained and strengthened.

In my mandate letter from the Prime Minister, I was asked to review the previous government's changes to the *Fisheries Act* and to look at ways we can restore lost protections and incorporate modern safeguards—this means habitat protections and more Conservation and Protection resources to enforce laws and regulations.

We consulted widely and I am pleased to report that we are making great strides towards restoring lost protections and incorporating modern safeguards into the Act—hoping to introduce legislation in Parliament soon after our return this fall.

I want to take this moment to thank you for your participation and input into Phase One of our consultations. I have great respect for the Federation, for the wide array of work that you do and the way in which you represent your members. Today, Phase Two of these consultations officially began. I encourage each and every one of you to participate in this consultation. Your input is central to our work.

I also want to thank the members of the House of Commons Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for their work on this review of the *Fisheries Act*—I know that committee member and MP for South Shore—Saint-Margaret's, Bernadette Jordan is here with us today. The Committee conducted a very substantial study on how to best restore lost protections to the legislation, hearing from a wide variety of stakeholders over several months. They produced a thorough report that has helped guide us at DFO as we move

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forward with amendments to the Act. We will continue to work with all our colleagues in the House and Senate to get this stronger legislation right.

As you all know, though, the *Fisheries Act* is about more than just environmental protections. This is the legislation that governs the way fisheries are managed in Canada—it is fundamental to our work at Fisheries and Oceans. Most of the policies and regulations that affect your day-to-day lives and livelihoods flow from this law.

With this review of the environmental protection provisions of the *Fisheries Act*, I also have the opportunity to make amendments to the Act that will strengthen fish management policies, and I intend to use this opportunity to enshrine owner-operator and fleet separation in law.

This will mean a legislative framework that affirms the ability of the Fisheries Minister to consider social and economic objectives in administering the *Fisheries Act*. Practically, along with other measures I am considering, this would mean that the Minister would be able to create regulations under law, to prohibit a fisherman from using a license to enter a controlling agreement or other arrangements that are contrary to social and economic objectives or are beyond the spirit and intent of the owner operator and fleet separation policies. No longer will these be only policies that some future government could ignore, they will have the force of law.

We are committed to the independence of the inshore sector, and to policies that support this independence. We will continue to work with you on these important changes.

Over the next few months, we will engage with your Federation and with other unions and associations about the application of these policies to make sure everyone is playing by the rules, and that the rules are properly enforced.

Owner-operator policies are just one way to make the fishery fairer for those who work hard to make their living from it.

Licensing is another policy area that's central to your way of life.

I'm here today to tell you that I'm interested in making that licensing process fairer—and that I need your input on how to do so.

We will start from the basic principle that the fishery is a public resource. It belongs to all Canadians. Licenses provide privileged access to this common property. Courts have consistently upheld this basic principle.

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As you know very well, right now licenses offer near-indefinite access to the fishery by virtue of automatic renewal and reissuance, and their ability to be transferred to others upon request.

Fishing licenses have become over-valued in recent years, especially here in southwest Nova Scotia. This makes it extremely difficult for young fishermen to access the fishery, and more often than not prevents new entrants altogether. The high upfront cost of a license means that many would-be fishers are excluded from the fishery because they simply do not have access to the large sums of money that fishery licenses have come to cost—despite their willingness to work hard and their desire to take on this way of life, and contribute to our economy.

A system where access to a fishing license is determined by who you're related to or how many hundreds of thousands of dollars you have, or how much debt you are willing to take on, seems unfair.

How can we address this? How can we create a licensing regime that does not pick winners and losers? How can we make sure that the benefits of the fishery go to those who work hard to prosecute it, and to the communities that support them? And, harvesters get a fair return for the investments they make in boats and equipment.

Like owner-operator, the goal of this conversation is to ensure that fishers and their local communities and economies benefit from the fishery.

It's not going to be easy. Change is never easy, especially when it's a change to something that's as fundamental to your livelihoods. To say there will be divergent views is an understatement. I'm sure that there are people in this very room who will vehemently disagree with one another on licensing questions.

But the key here is getting the conversation started. Our government believes in the importance of meaningful consultation with those who will be affected by the decisions we make—because it's you who feel the day-to-day impacts of these decisions.

I want to know what you think, and I want your views on how best to engage you as we move forward on licensing policies that better protect the independent owner-operator.

I know that any change to our licensing regime may have a major impact on your operations, so I want to reassure you that we are not making these changes tomorrow.

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This is only the beginning of an important conversation on an important topic, and we need your input to get it right.

Votre travail de pêcheur est plus important que jamais. Les gens du monde entier recherchent de plus en plus des poissons et des fruits de mer de qualité — et cette région est extrêmement bien placée pour profiter de cette demande.

Je sais que vous avez des attentes très élevées à l'égard de vos chefs de gouvernement — et c'est tout-à-fait normal. Vous êtes d'ardents défenseurs de votre industrie et vous comptez sur vos dirigeants pour répondre à un large éventail de problèmes qui ont une incidence sur vos moyens d'existence. Je me réjouis à l'idée de poursuivre le dialogue avec la Fédération et ses membres à mesure que nous appliquerons des politiques sur les pêches qui vous permettront de réussir davantage.

I'd like to close with another quote from my father's 1974 speech, which again resonates today.

“our best feedback is the voice of the fishermen. [...] For us with the power to influence policies, [you], the people whose lives we affect, will be our judges.”

And on that note, I look forward to taking your questions.