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For Immediate Release

Government Claws Back the Fish Harvester Benefit Leaving Thousands of Harvesters in Dire Financial Straits

The Canadian Independent Fish Harvester Federation (representing over 14,000 harvesters across the country) is shocked over Federal Government's unwillingness to help harvesters with the second installment of the Fish Harvester Benefit program. The funds were allocated in August 2020 to help the fishing industry navigate through the turbulent times of COVID-19.

In late August and early September over 4000 harvesters who applied to the Fish Harvester Benefit program last year, received letters demanding they return the funds deemed an 'overpayment' or appeal the decision by October 1st to avoid being further penalized. When Minister Jordan announced the program on August 5, 2020, she stated that *"Our fisheries operate under a unique structure and have faced distinct challenges throughout this pandemic."* We are concerned that these unique structures were never fully addressed in the development of the program. Furthermore, while the original appeal date of September 15th has been pushed to October 1st, this does not allow harvesters adequate time to prepare or reclassify income, particularly with the long wait times when contacting Service Canada.

"Many harvesters are actively fishing and have only just received this distressing news, which is understandably being met with shock and anger," according to Jim McIsaac, Vice President of the Federation.

We want to make sure that the program funds are being used to help harvesters who need the support and entitled to the benefit. We are asking that the deadlines with this program be extended to allow government and the fishing industry time to develop a solution that addresses the unique structures in the fishing industry.

"Given so many COVID-19 relief programs were modified after being announced it is disappointing that the government has not stepped up and fixed the structural issues and inefficiencies with the Fish Harvester Benefit. It is indicative of how little importance the fishing industry has inside government.", said Melanie Sonnenberg, President of the Federation.

The Federation is calling on government to step up immediately to amend the current program structure to reflect the realities of harvesters' employment, extend the appeal deadline, and extend the program deadline to reflect the time needed to address these issues.

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