
News Release

Lobster fishermen in crisis – crab and shrimp to follow, MP Byrne predicts

Ottawa (May 14, 2009) – Federal government help must come for lobster fishermen from Newfoundland and Labrador, MP Gerry Byrne repeated today.

“The industry is in absolute crisis, not only here at home but throughout Atlantic Canada and, yet, the federal government has done absolutely nothing to help”, Byrne said today. “We are going to have to push them into action and that is going to take quite a shove when it comes to this arrogant and indifferent Conservative government.”

Byrne said the hit to lobster fishermen from this province has been twofold. One setback comes from the extensive ice problem that has choked the bays along the northeast coast and the Northern Peninsula and served as a constant threat to traps being damaged from the moving ice flows. The other is the disaster unfolding in the marketplace.

“Lobster is now down well below its historic high just two years ago of six dollars a pound, down to just three dollars today”, Byrne said. “There is no solid basis for that. As one fisherman said, bologna now costs more in a store than lobster. Pork, even with the ridiculous threat of swine flu, still sells for more a cut than lobster. It’s ludicrous!”

Byrne demanded the federal government act immediately to put in place an action plan for lobster fishermen. Ideas he has floated include: increasing fishing EI benefits from 25 weeks a claim to 35 for those who only draw one claim a year, basing 2009 insurable benefits on 2008 landings, offering a lobster license buy-out program with a permanent reduction in capacity of those bought out, tax free earnings on the sale of these licenses and licenses valued at 2008 market conditions.

Byrne said processors need help as well. Access to credit is a huge problem and the Canadian dollar is seriously hurting buyers. He also believes money must be floated to allow companies to invest in high cost and high value projects such as lobster holding pounds.

“The bulk of this problem originates with profit taking on the mainland, I believe”, Byrne said. “It’s the larger buyers, not the local buyers which are controlling a falsely low price”.

Byrne said the government must keep a sharp eye on other fisheries such as crab and shrimp, which are already showing signs of breaking under the current strain. He ominously warned that action must be taken before it’s too late for Newfoundland and Labrador's billion dollar fishery.

For more information, contact:

Gerry Byrne, MP
709-637-4540