

Bulletin

December 2022

UFAWU Responds To DFO Licence Retirement Program

On December 14, 2022, UFAWU-Unifor learned the disheartening details of the Pacific Salmon Commercial Licence Retirement Program following a Fisheries and Oceans Canada announcement.

The announcement outlined a reverse auction system that will see harvesters competing to sell their licences for the lowest price. Harvesters have objected to a reverse auction since the buy-back was announced. DFO also declared that only \$123

million of the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative's (PSSI) \$647 million budget would be allocated to cover the licence retirement program, along with a licence alternation program and gear/vessel disposal program.

"This amount will not come close to compensating the commercial salmon fleet for their significant financial investments into licences, vessels and gear," UFAWU-Unifor Organizer Dawn Webb said.

The program also lacks criteria to determine which licences will be purchased — meaning that both active and inactive licences can be bought through the program. As a result, inactive licence holders could impact active licence holders during the reverse bidding process.

"Many active fishers and

fishing families rely on the sale of licences and vessels for retirement. With no access to fisheries, these working harvesters and owner-operators have become increasingly desperate," UFAWU-Unifor President James Lawson said.

DFO stated that while licences bought with funds from the Pacific Salmon Commercial Licence Retirement Program will be retired, funding is also available through the Relinquishment of Commercial Fishing Licence Eligibilities process, noting that "any applications submitted through the Pacific Salmon Commercial Licence Retirement Program may be considered for both processes." The latter program reallocates commercial licences to First Nations fisheries, not licence retirement.

"PSSI is touted as a plan to reduce pressure on

salmon stocks while helping to 'drive the transition to a smaller, more financially viable and sustainable fishery for remaining harvesters,'" Lawson said.

"DFO's ability to decide whether or not these licences are actually retired disregards this and is yet another example of a lack of transparency from DFO."

The announcement did not address significant investments made by harvesters such as fishing boats. Instead, the release announced the "Derelict Vessel Mitigation and Gear Disposal Program" which will offer fishers who have sold their licences through the program a way to "dispose" of their valuable fishing vessels and gear.

"We're being taken advantage of at our weakest moment," Lawson said.

Letter From UFAWU President James Lawson

Dear UFAWU Members,

2022 has been a challenging year for commercial fish harvesters. With salmon and herring fisheries seeing even further reductions of access, increased uncertainty on the impending MPA closures in the Northern Shelf Bioregion, and the alarming escalation of the cost to go fishing, there are heavy battles on many fronts.

The UFAWU Leadership and Staff are dedicated in the pursuit of protections for fishermen and workers in the BC commercial fishing industry, and for improvement of the management framework in which harvesters, shoreworkers and tendermen earn their livings.

While the challenges are steep and numerous, so too are our recent gains.

- We've negotiated a groundbreaking Collec-

tive Agreement with Canadian Fishing Company for salmon seiners – one that includes medical and dental benefits for fish harvesters.

- We have worked hard to increase fisheries for herring and salmon and hired Dr. Murdoch McAllister to assist in this work by providing qualified scientific assessments. The Union is proud to report that we were able to persuade DFO to have additional openings, such as on the Skeena.

- Our Staff and Leadership have made important strides in bringing the need for a Labour Force Adjustment Program for displaced harvesters to the forefront with Provincial and Federal Ministries. Displaced workers deserve transitional supports to withstand restructuring or to exit the industry with dignity.

- The UFAWU is pushing forward in the advocacy work toward an Owner-Operator licensing policy and Provincial Fisheries Loan Board, gaining key supporters among adjacent organizations, First Nations, and Ministerial policy advisors.

While there are many accomplishments to celebrate, we also continue to grieve a deeply felt loss.

Our Vice President Helen-Anne Beans passed away suddenly on September 25th at the young age of 32. Helen was an active fish harvester engaged in a wide variety of fisheries, from salmon to herring to prawns to halibut, and was the first Indigenous woman in Canada to achieve the certification of Fishing Master 4. We credit Helen with the accomplishment of ensuring that fixed wing Search and Rescue Aircraft were brought back to CFB Comox after a service gap was identified earlier this year, and in doing so she safeguarded the lives of fellow fish harvesters and all mariners along Canada's western coastline.

The UFAWU General Executive Board is developing a bursary in Helen's memory, to support young harvesters in their pursuit of advanced mariner certifications.

On October 18th, General Executive Board Member and 4th generation fish harvester, Kyle

Louis, was appointed by the GEB to the position of Vice President. Kyle is a strong addition to the Leadership of UFAWU, bringing with him the perspective and experience of an active young fish harvester who cares deeply for the future of fisheries.

As we press on with the work ahead, we encourage you to connect with us to discuss the endeavors of the UFAWU Staff & Leadership, and to continue to let us know how we can be of service to you.

On behalf of the UFAWU-Unifor's Leadership and Staff, I'd like to thank each of our Members for standing in solidarity with their fellow fish harvesters, shoreworkers, and tendermen, for the betterment of our fishing industry and livelihoods. We are stronger together, gaining invaluable ground as we grow and push forward.

'Wishing You and Yours a joyful Holiday Season and every success in the coming New Year!

In Solidarity,

James Lawson –
UFAWU-Unifor
President