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Québec is reawakening after several months of lockdown that have proven necessary to combat COVID-19. Despite some apprehension when fishing opened due to the market situation and health constraints related to COVID-19, the preliminary assessment for the season is a positive one, particularly for the lobster, snow crab and shrimp industries in each of Québec's maritime regions. This is good news for the entire industry. In fact, over the past few weeks, I have been in contact with representatives of fishers, processing plants and fish and seafood farmers to keep me informed of the particular issues affecting them.

In order to better support the commercial fisheries and aquaculture sector, on June 18, I announced the coming into force of the *Programme de revitalisation des parcs maricoles* [Mariculture Park Revitalization Program], whose objective is to support Québec mariculture producers wanting to replace their equipment or facilities. This measure has been estimated at \$2.4 million. Last week, the Government of Québec also reached an agreement with the Government of Canada to provide financial support to Québec's fish farmers in the exceptional context created by COVID-19. In total, the Government of Québec has invested more than \$850,000 in the fish farming industry since the beginning of the crisis to minimize fish mortality related to excess inventory.

Recently, I had the privilege of visiting the North Shore for the first time as ministre de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation and meeting with the various stakeholders in the region. This visit gave me a good understanding of

regional issues and the great importance of the fisheries sector to the regional economy, both on the North Shore and throughout Québec.

Finally, as the fishing season draws to a close for many fishers, I would like to acknowledge the great cooperation and all the efforts made by the industry to combat COVID-19. I wish you all a great summer. Above all, continue to stay safe!



Minister of Agriculture,
Fisheries, and Food

ANDRÉ LAMONTAGNE

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CHANGES REGARDING IMPORTING AND MOVING AQUATIC ANIMALS FOR QUÉBEC

By Nathalie Moisan,
from the Direction régionale de l'estuaire
et des eaux intérieures

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is responsible for the management of aquatic animal diseases in Canada, jointly with the Department of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. The infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) virus, which can affect Atlantic salmon, brown trout and rainbow trout (but is not transmissible to humans), has been suspected to be present in Québec for many years. Recently, samples taken from wild salmon were analyzed and the laboratory results allowed the CFIA to confirm the presence of this virus in Québec territory.

Infectious salmon anaemia is more common in saltwater reared fish. Infected fish may show signs of loss of appetite, swimming abnormalities, gulping for air at the surface, grey gills, etc. Mortality is low when fish hatch, but

increases as they grow. For more information on this topic, please refer to the ISA factsheet available on the CFIA website: <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/aquatic-animals/diseases/reportable-diseases/isa/facts/eng/1327198930863/1327199219511>

BACKGROUND IN QUÉBEC

The very nature of Atlantic salmon, which are highly migratory, makes them a vector for the virus, since they spend from one to three years at sea, where they rub shoulders with potentially contaminated salmon from other provinces or countries bordering the Atlantic, before returning to their native rivers to reach their spawning grounds and reproduce. These salmon are then found in the hundred or so Québec rivers, which favours the spread of the virus.

The agreements that Canada has concluded with other countries regarding trade in aquatic animals require the CFIA to inform its trading partners of detections made on its territory and to change Québec's status in light of this new situation. Thus, it has recently been established as "contaminated" for this pathogen.

Since this change in status, the import of live fish or fish parts (eggs) is no longer prohibited on the territory of Québec from provinces or countries contaminated by ISA. In addition, import permit requirements will continue to be set. For example, health certificates will be required to accompany consignments destined for entry into Canada and to support the conclusion that the pathogen is absent. The CFIA continues to protect Canada with strict rules to prevent the spread of the virus, and the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation is working closely with this agency and the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs, to protect both aquatic animals and fish farms.

A TRAP LAUNCH LIKE NO OTHER IN THE MAGDALEN ISLANDS

By Karine Villemaire,
from the Direction régionale
des îles-de-la-Madeleine

Despite the climate of uncertainty that reigned this spring due to COVID-19, the organizers of the activities surrounding the traditional trap launches on the Magdalen Islands were very successful in marking the beginning of the 145th trap fishing season on May 8 and 9, 2020. Demonstrating creativity and ingenuity, the Fondation Willie-Déraspe foundation's team and its partners were able to share the joyful atmosphere and frenzy that was very much present on the various wharves of the Madelinot archipelago.

In a totally virtual approach thanks to new technologies and social networks, the activities were broadcast live, including the *Rendez-Vous des travailleurs de la mer* [Marine Workers' Gathering], the blessing of the boats as well as the animation on the archipelago's docks before and during the grand departure to launch the traps. This year's theme, "All in the same boat," referred to fisheries, of course, as well as to the indispensable solidarity both at sea and in the context of the current pandemic.

As every year, the event attracted local and national media attention. Mr. Boucar Diouf, artist, biologist and oceanographer, was virtually keeping watch for the large fleet of fishing boats departing. In addition, all those who have been on the lookout in recent years were invited to send a message of encouragement to fishers and marine workers at the dawn of a very special season. Thus, Mr. Vincent Graton, Mr. Mario Cyr, Mr. Patrice L'Ecuyer, Mr. Ricardo Larrivée, Ms. Évelyne Brochu and many other personalities were able to virtually convey messages for safe seas and wishes for a good season to those in the Magdalen Islands' fisheries sector. The Ministre de l'Agriculture, des Pêches et de l'Alimentation, André Lamontagne, participated in the *Rendez-vous* with Mr. Joël Arseneau, Member of Parliament for the Magdalen Islands. The Ministre also took the opportunity to congratulate fishing owner-operators as well as the processing companies for the rapid implementation of the protocols and recommendations concerning COVID-19, which has helped ensure the safety of marine workers.



The "Blue Basket" initiative, which aims to increase the availability of Québec marine products on the plates of Québec consumers, was also highlighted.

On May 9, 2020, at 5 a.m., the signal for the grand departure was given and the 325 lobster vessels from the Magdalen Islands left the various wharves of the archipelago to launch their lobster traps. Pictures and videos of the 2020 Launch are still available on the Facebook page "*La mer sur un plateau*." Check it out!

The Fondation Willie-Déraspe, whose mission it is to promote awareness of marine resources and seafaring professions while highlighting the maritime way of life, organizes activities related to the start of the trap fishing season. The partners who made this virtual occasion possible deserve a special shout-out, namely L'Île Imagin'air and CFIM. It should also be noted that the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêches et de l'Alimentation provided financial support for this event, which showcases the fisheries sector well beyond the archipelago.

Have a great season!

Photos : © Nigel Quinn

COVID-19: TIPS TO HELP YOU

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF IN THE WORKPLACE

The COVID-19 situation is affecting everyone in one way or another and forces us to reflect on our ways of doing things. In order to clarify the situation, the National Public Health Institute of Québec (INSPQ) has published recommendations aiming to protect the health of employees in the industry and those who visit an associated workplace:

- Recommendations for the fishing industry:
<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2934-recommandations-peche-covid19>
- Recommendations for the food processing industry:
<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/publications/2952-food-industry-covid19>
- Recommendations for the marine product processing industry:
<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2964-travailleurs-industrie-transformation-produits-marins-covid19>

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT YOU

In light of the challenges posed by the current pandemic, the Sous-ministériel aux pêches et à l'aquaculture commerciales of the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêches et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ) has compiled an inventory of government support programs available to businesses and workers in the industry. To learn about these programs and whether you can benefit from them, please consult the following website: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/employers-workers-covid-19/>

CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMERCIAL FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR IN RECEIVING TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS DURING A PANDEMIC

By Omar Sarr,
from the Direction des analyses et des politiques des pêches et de l'aquaculture

Labour scarcity is one of the most significant challenges facing processing companies in the commercial fisheries and aquaculture sector in maritime regions. To meet their labour needs, these companies are increasingly turning to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which is jointly managed by the governments of Canada and Québec.

The objective of this program is to provide employers with access to foreign workers on a temporary basis when Canadians or permanent residents are not available and to ensure that these workers are protected. For example, for processing plants in the fisheries sector, two categories of occupations are primarily concerned, i.e. labourers and unskilled workers.

In 2019, processing plants in the fisheries sector on the North Shore, the Magdalen Islands and Gaspé Peninsula-Lower St. Lawrence hired a total of 151 foreign workers. For the 2020 commercial fishing season, several plants had already hired before Québec public health authorities decided to quarantine the population because of COVID-19. A total of 356 foreigners were expected to work in some ten plants on the North Shore, the Magdalen Islands and the Gaspé Peninsula-Lower St. Lawrence.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO COVID-19

In Québec, the commercial fishing season generally begins between mid-March and mid-April. It is at this point in time that processing plants usually bring on temporary foreign workers. However, in Canada and Québec, pandemic lockdowns began in mid-March. Mexico was also in lockdown at this time. It should be noted that the majority of these workers recruited in the fisheries sector in Québec come from Mexico.

Despite Canada's closed borders and the lockdown, the federal government has allowed temporary foreign workers to enter Canada to help Canadian businesses in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. These two sectors are considered essential in the context of the pandemic. However, to bring in the temporary foreign workers they had already recruited, marine product processing companies faced administrative challenges, among others. In fact, despite the health protocols put in place by the governments of Canada and Québec to facilitate the reception of these workers under conditions that comply with the health standards adopted to counter the pandemic, the exceptional administrative requirements to which workers of Mexican origin were subjected because of COVID-19 forced several marine product processing companies to give up their employment for the 2020 fishing season. Of the 10 companies that had planned to bring on temporary foreign workers this season, only 4 plants in the Gaspé Peninsula-Lower St. Lawrence were able to do so. The total number of temporary foreign workers received at these plants to date is 56, which is 16% of the planned number. It should be noted that temporary foreign workers can represent up to more than one-third of the personnel in a marine product processing plant. Going without these workers can therefore have a significant effect on a company's production activities.

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE: CONTINUITY OF MAPAQ ACTIVITIES

The ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ) would like to reiterate that its services are continuing despite the current situation related to COVID-19 and the various social distancing measures in effect. For example, to submit a project, follow up on your file, pay fees or ask questions, since telework is preferred for government employees, contact your regional office or the general information service before heading over:

DIRECTION RÉGIONALE DE LA CÔTE-NORD

418 964-8521
cote-nord@mapaq.gouv.qc.ca

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ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUÉBEC FISHERIES FUND

By Moez Khefifi,
from the Direction des analyses
et des politiques des pêches et de l'aquaculture

Following the first year of implementation of the Québec Fisheries Fund (QFF), launched in April 2019, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec and the Department of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard organized a meeting on March 11, 2020.

Despite the bad weather that day, some 30 stakeholders from the fisheries and aquaculture sector were able to participate in what can be described as a successful meeting. A review of the first year of implementation of the QFF was presented to participants. In summary, approximately 40 formal applications for funding were submitted between May 2019 and February 2020. Six projects have already been accepted for a total amount of \$708,000 and four others were in the process of receiving ministerial approval for a total amount of \$1.8 million. At the time of the meeting, the majority of funding applications were still being analyzed.

The participants, who represented different research centres, First Nations communities or associations, had the opportunity to discuss important industry issues and challenges in a focus group. This exercise made it possible to determine the types of projects to be favoured under the QFF for the year 2020-2021. Several types of projects were in line with the priorities established at the first annual meeting, held in 2019:

- collective rather than individual projects that involve collaboration among the various players in the value chain to ensure better cohesion among stakeholders in the fields of catching, aquaculture, processing and marketing;
- projects that improve the sustainable development of fishing and aquaculture by reducing the impact of fishing gear, limiting by-catches, improving environmental performance and avoiding waste through the full use of fish and the repurposing of its products and co-products;
- projects that improve industry performance by allowing us to diversify our markets and access those requiring product certification and traceability.



These priorities will continue to apply in 2020-2021 and will be complemented by those highlighted at the March 11, 2020 meeting, namely:

- initiatives that make it possible to obtain or renew eco-certification for our products and to improve the sustainability of fishing and aquaculture practices (development of alternative bait, new fishing gear and innovative technologies to reduce phosphorus discharges in fish farms and the repurposing of co-products in plants);
- scientific innovations and partnerships that enable diversification of the fishing and aquaculture industry, particularly through the development of emerging species or species with commercial potential;
- innovative work to address labour shortages and increase productivity and efficiency, including energy and digital technologies as well as automation.

The two departments will therefore give special attention to projects arising from the priorities mentioned above, without excluding any other relevant eligible projects.