

September 13, 2023

To: Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and Coast Guard

Sent via email to: DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Dear Minister,

I offer congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. As the NDP MP for North Island – Powell River, I represent a region that relies heavily on fisheries for economic prosperity.

As I am sure you are aware, the government has decided to remove fish farms from the water. This decision will directly affect people and businesses in my riding. Since the decision was made, I have spoken to many stakeholders, including the local union representatives, impacted communities, First Nations, and small businesses, all of whom expressed concerns about their future and the need for a transition plan.

Following my discussions with those groups, I have repeatedly asked your colleague, Minister Murray for a clear and transparent transition plan to move fish farms from water to land. Back in 2019, the Prime Minister mandated that the government would work with local stakeholders to create such a transition plan, yet as of now there still has not been a plan communicated to us, nor has there been any movement in the way of an open process that alleviates the anxieties of local stakeholders.

In 2020, the Liberal government said it would phase out fish farms by 2022. We are now halfway through 2023 and the deadline has been moved back to 2025. The people in my riding are frustrated by the uncertainty this delay has caused, given that there is still so little communication about the transition. They want to know that you will stop delaying and take action. The government needs to follow through on its commitment to remove the fish farms from the water.

As I have with the previous minister, I urge you to

- develop a strong and thorough transition plan/jobs plan that encompasses stakeholder consultation
- provide a timeline for the plan that holds firm on the 2025 deadline
- establish an office in highly impacted communities to assist workers in finding alternate jobs in their areas, including staff that can identify employment and training opportunities for those who have lost their jobs
- use money from the \$649 million Pacific Salmon Strategy towards regions and communities impacted by the changeover in fish farms, as moving fish farms to land would meet the strategy's mandate to restore wild salmon
- acknowledge and work with the First Nations who have developed positive relationships with the industry
- ensure that the people of my riding will not be forgotten as the fish farm relocation process is undertaken

While I respect the government's decision regarding fish farms, I am frustrated that there has been little communication from the government regarding the transition plan.

Additionally, I have spoken with roe herring fishermen in my riding to discuss the current high cost of licence fees, which I understand are set at \$4,000 while their fishing quota has been reduced from 20% to 10%.



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I recognize the importance of protecting vulnerable ecosystems; however, it is also critical that any decisions, fees, and quotas be determined thoughtfully and with a clear explanation of the factors considered.

Please provide an explanation for the decisions to set the quota at 10% and the licence fees at \$4,000.

Compounding the issue of the high cost of licence fees is the lack of limits on foreign ownership of commercial fishing licences and quotas in the Pacific Region. As I and my fellow NDP colleagues brought up in previous letters to Minister Murray, the government has continued to jeopardize the livelihoods of Canadian workers and the sustainability of our fisheries with the continued sale of our fisheries to foreign businesses.

This is despite the implementation of the Policy for Preserving the Independence of the Inshore Fleet in Canada's Atlantic Fisheries, which sets a framework for selling licences in the Atlantic region. That policy has resulted in a stabilizing of fisheries incomes in the Atlantic Region.

The people of the Pacific Region deserve the same consideration as their counterparts in the Maritimes. Please recognize these important concerns and ban the transfer of Canadian commercial fishing licences and quotas to foreign owners or foreign beneficial interests.

Finally, I have met with David Mills of Watershed Watch and SkeenaWild Conservation Trust, who has raised the alarm about the significant impact Alaska interception fisheries have had on communities across British Columbia.

As I understand it, last year the Alaskan fleet in the Southeast took more Canadian salmon than our entire marine salmon harvest. According to reports, the 2.2 million Canadian salmon intercepted by Alaska cost our economy \$100 million. Commercial fisheries, communities, and First Nations who are working to restore their fishing rights, are all deeply impacted by the Alaska interception fisheries.

I agree with David Mills that the \$649 million investment in Pacific salmon will not pay off if those salmon end up in Alaska's nets. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening all too frequently.

Please let me know whether the federal government is doing anything to compel Alaska to negotiate its actions regarding salmon interception, so that BC stocks are protected.

Many people in my riding and in ridings across British Columbia rely on fisheries to sustain their economy. They deserve to have their voices heard.

I look forward to receiving your responses to the issues I have brought up. I would like to meet with you when the House resumes so we can discuss these concerns and how we can work together to help the people in this region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Blaney".

Rachel Blaney, MP
North Island-Powell River

cc: The Hon. Gudie Hutchings, Minister of Rural Economic Development