A decision by Fisheries and Oceans Canada to make the practice of tubbing and selling frozen-at-sea prawn tails illegal threatens fish harvester livelihoods and local food access

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, March 11, 2021 — The federal government is changing the way they interpret a regulation that has been in place for over 40 years, making it impossible for fish harvesters to sell frozen-at-sea spot prawn tails to a local, domestic market. The commercial prawn industry, as a whole, is a sustainable fishery, bringing $45 million into British Columbia's economy each year. With no consultation, and only a few months' notice, this regulation change has effectively cut off the market for local BC prawn tails.

DFO's decision, in the middle of the pandemic, is adding more strife to fish harvesters, who are already facing huge market challenges. Wholesale prices for prawns have dropped more than 50% since COVID-19 hit in 2020, and many prawn harvesters have tried to recover their losses by selling their catch locally. Remote coastal communities are also experiencing barriers to local seafood access, as most of the fish and seafood being caught is shipped and sold internationally. This sudden change in regulation puts additional strain on the livelihoods of prawn harvesters, their families, as well as coastal economies and local food security.

Quotes

Tasha Sutcliffe, Senior Advisor, Community Fisheries, Ecotrust Canada: "*As an organization that believes in the local economic, social, and cultural value of small boat fisheries tied to their communities — a group our fisheries program aims to support — Ecotrust Canada is shocked to hear that DFO has decided that it is now illegal to freeze prawn tails in tubs for the local market. If this is truly about better resource management, DFO should be working with independent fish harvesters to design a solution that will achieve conservation objectives while also avoiding harm to the many coastal residents and families whose enterprises this fishery supports. Prawn harvesters also want to have a well-managed sustainable fishery and have asked DFO to work with them on this issue. Unfortunately, this move by DFO will only further push out the small boat fish harvesters who have successfully built a sustainable fishery with a highly celebrated local seafood market for British Columbia. It is yet another policy decision that punishes independent small boat fish harvesters and the coastal communities they call home, and favours a highly corporatized and commodified fishery. Right now rural communities are grappling with unprecedented challenges in the face of climate change and a global pandemic, including food insecurity and job loss. Now more than ever, we need governments that will stand up for our hardworking, local, BC food producers.*"

Cailyn Siider, Community Development Director, TBuck Suzuki Foundation, and prawn harvester from Sointula, BC: "*As fishermen, our connection to the seafood we harvest isn't just tied to the decks of our boats. Sharing and selling our catch to feed our family, friends, and communities is an integral part of our livelihood and culture. The ability to distribute our prawn tails locally can be an act of caring for our communities, something that connects us, not only to the people whose bellies and freezers we fill, but to the ecosystem we are so deeply a part of. This sudden and perplexing re-interpretation of regulation by DFO threatens not only the health and well-being of our families and communities, but that of everyone who depends on spot prawns for food, both as a premium product and as subsistence.*"

About Fisheries for Communities

Fisheries for Communities is a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous fish and shellfish harvesters, small businesses, fishmongers, fish harvester organizations, NGO's, and allied community groups and individuals. For more info go to https://www.fisheriesforcommunities.org/

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