

Press release: B.C. fishermen work to protect coastal communities

April 20th – Active B.C. fishermen have established a series of COVID-19 protocols to protect rural coastal communities, First Nations, and fish harvesters from the novel coronavirus. Fishermen understand the vulnerability of remote communities and are taking extraordinary measures to protect these communities.

The protocols are intended to support fishermen, communities, harbour authorities, and others in the industry to mitigate the risk of transmission between fishermen and our coastal communities; to protect fishermen from contracting the virus; and to ensure healthy and nutritious seafood reaches Canadians.

Fishermen play a vital role in Canada's pandemic response by supplying Canadians with healthy and nutritious food and have been designated as essential workers by the provincial and federal governments. Their work necessarily involves travel along our coast, including to rural coastal communities and fish plants where they must offload their catch, resupply, and maintain vessels and equipment. For many, these communities are also home to family, friends and colleagues.

The protocols offer practical instructions covering everything from quarantine time and pre-season preparations to best practices while at sea. They include guidelines for safely offloading the catch and re-supplying with fuel and food, instructions on dealing with non-COVID health issues while at sea, and recommendations to communities on how they can safely support fishermen. They also recommend that harbourside facilities open when possible, as many fishermen live onboard for weeks or months at a time.

The COVID-19 Active Fishermen's Committee also emphasizes that if fishermen anticipate increasing their commercial fishing activity in a First Nation's territory due to COVID-19, they are advised to consult with the appropriate nation beforehand and to prioritize First Nations access to food fisheries and offer support to individual nations if asked.

The COVID-19 Active Fishermen's Committee is a 25-person emergency committee formed on March 25, 2020 with the support of 150 harvesters representing all BC fisheries. It is comprised of active B.C. fishermen and representatives from fishing associations, is tasked with dealing with issues related to COVID-19 and harvesters including Community-Fisheries Safety Protocols.

Quotes:

“These communities are where we grew up, they're our homes and those of the people we employ, so there was no question that the safety of our communities had to be maintained first and foremost. These protocols were our priority to ensure we're operating in a way that's safe for coastal communities and First Nations.” – Guy Johnson, active fisherman and COVID-19 fisheries protocol coordinator

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