



March 26, 2020

The Hon. Bernadette Jordan, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard  
200 Kent St  
Ottawa ON K1A 0E6  
Email: [min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

Dear Minister:

**Re: COVID-19 Pandemic and the Urgent Needs of Canada's Farmed Seafood Sector**

On behalf of Canada's farmed seafood producers, we wish to acknowledge the actions your government has taken to date to address the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, including Canada's \$82 billion COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, and actions to close the Canada-US border to non-essential travellers, while allowing essential and business travel to continue unimpeded to preserve vital supply chains between the two countries. Our industry strongly supports continued federal-provincial-territorial collaboration to minimize the health, social, and economic impacts of COVID-19.

I would also like to thank you for your direct outreach to me last week, and your department's engagement on these issues.

The purpose of this letter is to formally record the specific challenges our sector is facing, and to seek your support to implement critical measures to enable our sector to survive and continue to supply the Canadians with seafood in the immediate term.

As you know, our sector is the bedrock of many coastal communities across Canada, providing employment to more than 25,000 Canadians across the country. However, the unprecedented public health measures that have been implemented to blunt the spread of COVID-19 have caused extreme economic disruptions. At present, our shellfish producers are seeing near total reduction in market demand; finfish production continues but is seeing significant demand reductions as well. Forced restaurant closures and active encouragement for Canadians to maintain social distancing and to stay home have been particularly disruptive for our industry, since more than 90% of farmed shellfish and 50% farmed finfish is sold to food service establishments. Grocery demand has also declined.

These sudden, unanticipated market impacts have placed severe stress on our domestic seafood infrastructure – our ability to harvest, farm, process, and distribute seafood products.



In the short term, here is what our members have identified as critical needs from the federal government:

- 1. Federal leadership in defining aquaculture as an essential service.** Provinces in Atlantic Canada, as well as Ontario and Quebec have already identified aquaculture as an essential service, but uncertainty remains with regard to BC and the Yukon. Also, clarity is required to ensure that suppliers to our sector are also deemed essential services (as Ontario and Quebec have done), and to have consistency across provinces so that there are no interprovincial barriers to the movement of essential resources (workers, goods and services).
  
- 2. Access to Farm Income Supports:** As you are aware, seafood farmers do not have access to other farm income and risk management supports that are available to crop and other livestock farmers in Canada. But we face unique risks as noted above. There are a number of measures that our members are seeking:
  - a. Payroll support:** Seafood farming companies are calling for immediate federal support by way of a grant of 25% of 2019 payroll costs or a minimum 70–80% payroll subsidy (as governments have done in UK and Europe) to businesses whose sales are drastically impacted but who still need workers. Significant losses in farmed seafood sales due to Covid-19 has severely impacted company's cash flow and is putting tremendous pressure on their ability to keep people working and prevent lay-offs. Financial payroll support is urgently needed from the Federal and Provincial/Territorial governments so farmers can keep their "essential" employees working.
  - b. Catastrophic loss protection:** We are dealing with live animals that require 24/7 attention, often in very remote areas. By not having adequate staff, there is a risk of animal welfare impacts if we are unable to attend to feeding and plankton mitigation systems for finfish. For shellfish, reduction in ongoing husbandry activities like seeding, splitting down and tumbling could lead to loss of inventory and degradation of product quality due to overcrowding. The potential cascading effect of labour shortages on our farm sites due to COVID-19 could lead to major losses of stock – both in finfish and shellfish. If our sector is to survive such losses and continue to provide food to Canadians, access to specialized catastrophic loss support from the federal government would be needed.
  
- 3. Enhanced access for front line workers to COVID-19 testing and safety equipment:** Our member companies have responded to the extraordinary circumstances created in the workplace by COVID-19, implementing safe zone protocols for employees and supply chain partners at farm sites, hatcheries, and processing facilities, and enabling employees to work from home, where possible, to enable farming operations to continue. However, our sector is somewhat unique in that farm sites are often quite remote and confined, and despite the measures that companies have implemented, some employees have chosen for their own safety not to work. These are workers with specialized skills that cannot be easily replaced. This



situation could be alleviated to some extent if our workers had priority access COVID-19 testing and to safety equipment such as N95 masks, gloves and sanitizer.

- 4. **Regulatory flexibility is needed.** Given the worker shortages we are facing, our basic animal husbandry activities must take priority which means that some regulatory requirements will be very difficult to complete (e.g. sea lice counts, AAR reporting, etc). We ask that DFO inspectors be directed to be prudent and flexible in their compliance and enforcements activities over the coming weeks and months given the very real challenges our members are facing.
- 5. **Targeted exemptions to border closings:** We need exemptions for foreign vessels and crew who are contracted for work on our farms – harvesting and transportation.
- 6. **Federal direction to ensure essential transportation services are maintained.** Some of our producers rely on commercial airlines to deliver their live product (e.g. fish ova). However, a number of major commercial carriers have declared they will no longer transport live animals due to COVID-19 concerns, and air cargo carriers charge four times the price.

I want to thank you again for your personal attention to these critical issues, and look forward to our continued collaboration to find solutions for our sector.

Sincerely,

Timothy Kennedy  
President & CEO  
Canadian Aquaculture Industry  
Alliance

Tom Smith  
Executive Director  
Aquaculture Association of  
Nova Scotia

Susan Farquharson  
Executive Director  
Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers  
Association

John Paul Fraser  
Executive Director  
BC Salmon Farmers Association

Jim Russell  
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BC Shellfish Growers  
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Mark Lane  
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RJ Taylor  
Executive Director  
Ontario Aquaculture Association

Peter Warris  
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Industry Liaison  
PEI Aquaculture Alliance

C.C.

FEDERAL

- Hon Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada
- Timothy Sargent, Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Chris Forbes, Deputy Minister, AAFC
- Paul Halucha, Assistant Deputy Secretary to Cabinet, Privy Council Office
- Richard Botham, Assistant Deputy Minister, Finance Canada

NL

- Hon. Gerry Byrne, Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources
- Lori Anne Companion, Deputy

PE

- Hon. Jamie Fox, Minister of Fisheries and Communities
- Bob Creed, Deputy

NS

- Hon. Keith Colwell, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Loretta Robichaud, Deputy

NB

- Hon. Ross Wetmore, Minister of Aquaculture and Fisheries
- Cathy LaRoche, Deputy

ON

- Hon. Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Hon. Jeff Yurek, Minister of Environment
- Hon. John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
- Greg Meredith, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Serge Imbrogno, Deputy Minister of Environment

QC

- Hon. André Lamontagne, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- Marc Dion, Deputy Minister, Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

BC

- Hon. Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture
- Wes Shoemaker, Deputy