

SEA-NL demands province intervene in northern shrimp ‘hostage situation’

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Friday, May 5th, 2023**

Seaward Enterprises Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (SEA-NL) demands the provincial government immediately intervene in the case of two shrimp boats from Port au Choix that are being denied ice from local supplies because they plan to sell their catches in New Brunswick.

“Make no mistake these shrimp boats are being held hostage at the wharf by the local buyer who refuses to let them go,” says Ryan Cleary, SEA-NL’s Executive Director. “The province must investigate immediately, and I’ll be writing a letter to that effect today to Premier Andrew Furey.”

Fishermen Barry Plowman and Calvin Gould, owner-operators of the 65 footers *Challenger 88* and *Nightbreaker*, have been geared up at the wharf in Port au Choix since Thursday ready to start fishing shrimp in the Gulf.

The enterprise owners say they have a buyer lined up in New Brunswick, where they plan to unload for a better price than the \$1.08/lb average price set on April 25th by the province’s price-setting panel.

But at least four local suppliers have refused to sell them the ice they need to start fishing. The fishermen say the suppliers fear being “put out of business” by the local processing company that usually buys their shrimp.

“We can steam to New Brunswick and back to get ice but that would mean thousands of dollars extra in fuel alone,” says Barry Plowman. “This is most definitely a hostage situation.”

This year is the most chaotic year in decades in the Newfoundland and Labrador fishing industry, with turmoil in the province’s three largest commercial fisheries — shrimp, lobster, and snow crab — with a total landed value in 2022 of almost \$1 billion.

While some shrimp boats from this province plan to land in the Maritimes for higher prices, the snow crab fleet has been tied up since early April, refusing to fish for the panel-set price of \$2.20/lb. Processors have also refused to buy lobster for the agreed-to formula prices.

Earlier this week SEA-NL called for a second, sweeping review of this province’s final offer-selection system of fish pricing after last year’s lightning-fast three-month review by an independent consultant failed to fix the problems.

The consultant who carried out the 2022 price-setting review rejected SEA-NL's idea of an electronic auction pilot project, and didn't entertain the suggestion of outside buyers, which apparently fell outside the review's mandate.

So too did the control that some processors (foreign and domestic) have over inshore enterprises, as well as the exclusion of fish pricing from the federal Competition Act.

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