

Licence holders encouraged to step forward if not in control of boat/licences; DFO investigating

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Tuesday, Aug. 29th, 2023**

Seaward Enterprises Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (SEA-NL) encourages inshore owner-operators who have lost control of their commercial licences or fishing enterprise to contact Fisheries and Oceans, which is actively investigating several cases

“If you are not in control of your boat or licences then contact DFO and have it made right,” says Ryan Cleary, SEA-NL’s Executive Director.

“By law, licensed inshore harvesters must be independent — solely in control of their enterprise, licences, and catch — and if you are not then SEA-NL encourages you to take control.”

In June, SEA-NL wrote then-DFO Minister Joyce Murray to request an investigation into the case of an inshore owner-operator who had lost control of his multi-million-dollar fishing enterprise to a fish processor.

The enterprise included boat, gear, and licences (including snow crab), and the fishermen in question and his family were left without a dime, or a clue as to how it happened.

DFO launched an investigation, and has been investigating similar cases. The department’s Conservation and Protection division released this email for licence holders to contact them directly: [NL-TN.Licences@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:NL-TN.Licences@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

DFO’s owner-operator policy requires licence holders to fish the licence themselves, and reap the rewards. The rationale is to promote small-scale fishermen, and to prevent large companies from accumulating multiple licences.

Only companies have been accumulating inshore licences or controlling enterprises through financial/controlling agreements.

DFO has been circulating a random but mandatory questionnaire in recent months to commercial licence holders to learn of any and all financial arrangements that may jeopardize the owner-operator principle.

The three-page "eligibility assessment questionnaire" asks the license holder to disclose any and all financial agreements tied to commercial fishing licences. Those agreements can be informal, verbal, or handshake in nature.

In 2021 a former president of the FFAW said the majority of some fishing fleets in this province are illegally owned by fish processing companies.