



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

August 21, 2023, Yarmouth

VIA EMAIL

Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, MP, C.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa (ON)
K1A 0A5

Subject: Urgent Action Required to combat lobster poaching in St. Mary's Bay

Dear Minister,

We write to you today on behalf of the concerned citizens and legal fish harvesters of West Nova and South Shore-St. Margarets. We wish to draw your immediate attention to a matter of utmost importance – the increasing incidents of lobster poaching in the critical lobster summer breeding grounds of St. Mary's Bay, which impact not only Nova Scotia but also the New England States.

Our communities are gravely concerned about the escalating levels of illegal lobster fishing taking place within this vital breeding area. We are jointly calling upon you to set a new standard within the department and enforce the law with the utmost urgency. It is crucial that we avoid repeating the inaction of your predecessors, Bernadette Jordan and Joyce Murray, who failed to address the pressing issue of criminal poaching activities.

The opportunity now lies before you to send a resounding message to both the fishing industry and criminals involved in this illegal activity. This is not a mere food and ceremonial fishery; rather, it is an unlawful, out-of-season commercial endeavor that poses a significant threat to the stability of lobster stocks and the wellbeing of our communities. The brazen presence of these illegal boats dropping pots in the very nursery of these marine creatures is cause for serious alarm. The poaching of lobsters in their summer breeding grounds has the potential to disrupt not only the local ecosystem but also the entire southwest Nova Scotia and New England lobster industry.

It is imperative that you take a firm stand for what is right and act decisively to halt these criminal activities before the situation spirals out of control. We recall the recent elver fishing debacle, where Minister Joyce Murray's actions only ended up penalizing legal license holders rather than deterring poachers. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) claimed adequate resources for elver fishery policing, yet the reality was quite different, resulting in a continuation of poaching.

Recent statements from the DFO, asserting its readiness to enforce the lobster fishery this summer in St. Mary's Bay, have unfortunately not been backed by tangible action. Numerous unlicensed boats are currently involved in poaching lobster at levels not seen since the crisis of 2020. Once again, the DFO appears to be merely "observing" rather than effectively enforcing the law against poachers.

We cannot afford to stand idly by and allow criminals to wreak havoc upon our legal lobster fishery. The stock must be safeguarded against criminal activities and poaching, especially given the unprecedented yield per pot during this season. With as much as 100 pounds of lobster per pot being pulled from the warm waters daily, the delicate reproduction cycle of these creatures faces an imminent threat. What we are witnessing is a full-fledged summer season of poaching, with license plates from New Brunswick, Quebec, and the New England states readily visible along the wharf. This organized criminal enterprise poses a clear and present danger to our fishing industry.

In light of these urgent concerns, we strongly urge you to take the following actions:

- **Initiate Immediate Enforcement:** Implement stringent enforcement measures to immediately halt lobster poaching activities in St. Mary's Bay.
- **Collaborate with Law Enforcement:** Coordinate efforts with relevant law enforcement agencies to apprehend poachers, seize their gear, and confiscate their boats, signaling a zero-tolerance approach to criminal fishing activities.

The time for decisive action is now, Minister LeBouthillier. We implore you to seize this moment to make a profound difference in our shared commitment to protecting our oceans and preserving our fisheries. The vitality of our marine ecosystems, the well-being of our communities, and the future of the fishing industry depend on your swift and resolute response to this critical issue.

Thank you for your immediate attention and for taking the necessary steps to uphold the law and protect our valuable marine resources.

Sincerely,



Chris d'Entremont
Member of Parliament for West Nova
Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons



Rick Perkins
Member of Parliament for South Shore-St. Margarets