



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

200 Kent Street
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0E6

Pêches et Océans
Canada

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Ottawa, Canada
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PROTECTED A

Your file - Votre référence

Our file - Notre référence

A-2020-00330 / LS

August 5, 2020

Mr. Dylan Robertson
Winnipeg Free Press
501-150 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1P 5A4

Dear Mr. Robertson:

We have completed the processing of the documents in response to the request you submitted under the *Access to Information Act* for:

***“Meeting with Niki Ashton, Member of Parliament 2020-05-13 Ref #
Organization: Fisheries and Oceans Canada Sector: Strategic Policy
Addressee: 2020-009-00227 Minister Action Required: For Information.”***

The exemption and exclusion provisions s. 21(1)(a), 68(a) of the Act have been applied; a copy of the relevant sections is attached.

Note that no document for Tab 4 of the memo was created or provided to the Minister.

Please be advised that you are entitled to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner of Canada concerning the processing of your request within sixty (60) days of receipt of this notice. In the event you decide to avail yourself of this right, your notice of complaint can be submitted online at - <https://www.oic-ci.gc.ca/en/submitting-complaint>, or by mail to:

Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada
30 Victoria Street
Gatineau, QC K1A 1H3

Should you have any questions, please contact Lisa Smith at 613-990-6528 or lisa.smith@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

Yours sincerely,

2020-08-05

X 

Signed by: Tremblay, Julie

César Kagame
Director
Access to Information and Privacy Secretariat

Enclosures:

1. *Access to Information Act*: Applicable exemption/exclusion provisions
2. Final release package: 7 pages

Access to Information Act

21(1)(a) ADVICE OR RECOMMENDATIONS

21. (1) The head of a government institution may refuse to disclose any record requested under this Act that contains advice or recommendations developed by or for a government institution or a Minister of the Crown.

68(a) PUBLISHED MATERIAL

68. This Act does not apply to published material or material available for purchase by the public.



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

Approved by Timothy Sargent

UNCLASSIFIED

GCCMS #: 2020-009-00227

EKME #: 4156822

SCENARIO NOTE FOR THE MINISTER

Meeting with Niki Ashton, M.P.
Date, Time, Location, TBC

SUMMARY

The purpose of this meeting is for you to hear MP Niki Ashton's concerns about COVID-19 impacts on the Manitoba fishing industry and communicate the ongoing work of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to support fish harvesters. Ms. Ashton's biography is at Tab 1.

Ms. Ashton is expected to raise the need to consider fish harvesters as essential workers, create opportunities to ensure Canadian consumers have increased access to freshwater fish products, and provide emergency relief to inland harvesters. Ms. Ashton will also likely raise COVID-19's impact on the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC), as well as the process to transform its governance and ownership model.

Your objective is to discuss the current situation in the fisheries and aquaculture sector broadly.

Overview

Ms. Ashton is Member of Parliament for Churchill Keewatinook – Aski, the federal electoral district that comprises the majority of central and northern Manitoba. Her constituency includes a large portion of the Manitoba fish harvesters who sell to the FFMC. She recently wrote to you to request an emergency government response to support that industry (Tab 2).

The implications of COVID-19's impact on the Manitoba fishery is similar to those of the coastal fisheries. Demand for freshwater fish, especially walleye, has decreased dramatically, while the costs of maintaining safe working conditions compliant with provincial and federal orders and guidance, have been substantial. While both the FFMC and harvesters have pursued local markets and retail channels to absorb excess supply and inventories, it has not been enough to cover the lost demand, and walleye prices – the most lucrative fish species – have plummeted. Like in coastal fisheries, inland harvesters rely on the income from their catch to qualify for fishers' Employment Insurance.

DFO does not manage the commercial fisheries in Manitoba, which is under provincial jurisdiction, as per the *Manitoba Natural Resources Transfer Act*.

1. Fish harvesters as essential workers

Ms. Ashton expressed the importance of ensuring harvesters are recognized as an essential service. Public Safety Canada developed guidance on essential services, which includes fish harvesters and food supply chain workers. All provincial and territorial governments, including the Province of Manitoba, have included food and food-related businesses as essential. Fish harvesters and licensed dealers are also considered essential in the province.


Key messages:

- **The federal government provided guidance to provincial governments essential services during this pandemic, which included food and food processing entities.**
- **I understand the Province of Manitoba has recognized fish harvesters, along with all other workers in the fish supply chain in the province as essential services.**

2. FFMC Operations

Ms. Ashton's most recent correspondence comes after FFMC informed fish harvesters and other stakeholders (Tab 3), that for 2020-21, it would not buy walleye (i.e. pickerel), the primary income species for the fishery, and would only buy other species as much as they could supply ongoing demand. Prior to this season, walleye has been the primary source of returns both to the FFMC and the fish harvesters that it serves. However, recent increases in supply of the species from Lake Erie has depressed prices. Given the walleye situation, Ms. Ashton may raise longer term support for harvesters similar to the requests of coastal fisheries.

Since Manitoba's withdrawal from the *Freshwater Fish Marketing Act* in December 2017, the FFMC operates as a provincially licensed fish dealer in Manitoba, but is not obligated to purchase all fish offered to it for sale there.



Key messages:

- **I understand the importance of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation to the continued welfare of fish harvesters in northern Manitoba.**
- **Given the FFMC's status as an arm's length Crown corporation, I rely on the Corporation's board and management to govern its activities in accordance with its mandate.**
- **Harvesters will be able to sell some of their catch, and are eligible for the federal suite of emergency programs available.**

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3. Access to federal support programs

On April 25, the federal government announced measures to assist coastal fish and seafood processors in accessing short term financing to pay for maintenance, storage capacity, health and safety compliance and marketing and technological retooling. More significantly, as a Crown corporation, the FFMC is ineligible to receive funding through this program or any other federal COVID-19 supports available, such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), the Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP), and the Farm Credit Canada financing.

However, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) is available to eligible Manitoba fish harvesters, and FFMC has informed the Department that many are taking advantage of this support. Moreover, some harvester organizations and co-operatives are eligible to receive support through CEWS, CEBA and BCAP. Support for Indigenous businesses and communities through Aboriginal Financial Institutions has been increased to provide up to \$30,000 in interest free loans, and \$10,000 in non-repayable contributions. Additional information on these programs is included in Tab 4.

No document for Tab 4 was provided to the Minister.

Key messages:

- **As a Crown corporation, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is not eligible to receive funding through the Government of Canada's suite of COVID-19 emergency programs.**
- **However, inland harvesters are eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.**
- **Additional benefits are available for fishing enterprises and cooperatives, including the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, Business Credit Availability Program, the Canada Emergency Business Account, and through Aboriginal Financial Institutions.**

4. FFMC Transformation

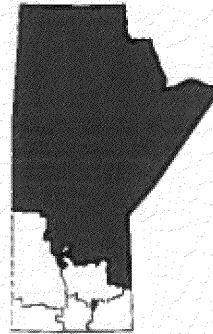
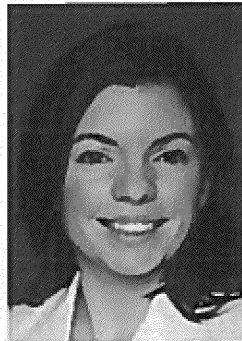
Since 2017, DFO has pursued a process to seek options to transform the FFMC from a federal Crown corporation. Ms. Ashton and her office have been actively engaged in that process. The Interlocutor appointed to lead the next phase of FFMC transformation is currently engaging an interim committee of fish harvesters to assess the capacity of the industry to take ownership and control of the Corporation, and the conditions under which they would be willing to do so. The Interlocutor has continued to meet via teleconference with the interim committee, and is expected to provide a report on the feasibility of that transformation by the end of summer 2020.

Key messages:

- **I appreciate the leadership you have shown regarding the work to improve and transform the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation**
- **The Interlocutor for Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation Transformation is continuing his work and engaging with a select number of harvesters through teleconference.**
- **I look forward to receiving his findings and advancing this initiative in the months to come.**

Attachments: 4

Tab 1 – Biography: Niki Ashton



Niki Christina Ashton is the New Democratic Member of Parliament for the federal electoral district of Churchill—Keewatinook Aski in Manitoba, Canada. She serves as the NDP's Critic for Democratic Reform and Transport, and Deputy Critic for Women and Gender Equality. She has served as critic for Aboriginal Affairs, Status of Women, Post-Secondary Education and Youth, and most recently, as the critic for Jobs, Employment and Workforce Development.

Niki Ashton is a graduate of R.D. Parker Collegiate in Thompson as well as Li Po Chun United World College. She has a BA in Global Political Economy from the University of Manitoba, an MA in International Affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. She is currently completing her PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba.

Niki Ashton has served as a Member of Parliament since 2008. Prior to that she was an instructor at the University College of the North. she has also interned at Canadian Embassies and the United Nations.

NIKI ASHTON, M.P.
Churchill—Keewatinook Aski



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Email: niki.ashton@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Jordan,

I am writing to you to urge your Government to work with fishers in our region and through Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) to establish an emergency relief program given the crisis they are facing.

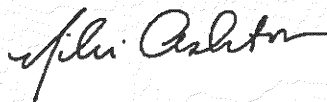
I have been contacted by fishers across our region who are very worried that they will not be able to make ends meet as the COVID-19 crisis has already impacted demand for their product as well as the daily operation of the FFMC plant in Winnipeg. The inland fishery is a key contributor to our local economies and the jobs created are invaluable in our region. The economic contributions of fishers are desperately needed given the high unemployment rates in our region that have only been exacerbated through this crisis.

The federal government must do everything possible to ensure that fishers have access to an emergency relief program so that they do not go under. The federal government ought also to recognize the work of fishers as essential work given that they harvest an important and healthy source of food. Work ought to be done with fishers and FFMC to create opportunities at this time to ensure fish being harvested is made more available to Canadian consumers.

Fishers in our region have seen the commitment made to the agricultural sector. We ought to see meaningful government support for inland fishers here in Manitoba and elsewhere who do critical work and provide a healthy source of food.

Time is of the essence. I look forward to your Government's response and action on this front.

Sincerely,



MP Niki Ashton
Churchill—Keewatinook Aski

cc: Stan Lazar, Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation Interim President





April 20, 2020

To: all Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation stakeholders

RE: The impact of COVID-19 on Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC)

The global spread and subsequent economic and social disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented for us all and for the FFMC. The restaurant and hospitality industry is being impacted particularly hard, resulting in a global collapse of the food-service supply chain. Restaurants all over the world, accounting for the overwhelming majority of our customer base have closed, eliminating demand for the food-service products we sell. Reduced demand for our fish from the economic impact of COVID-19 is lowering sales revenues to unsustainable levels, placing substantial strain on the Corporation's cash flows. The Corporation is required to conduct its operations on a self-sustaining basis without appropriations from Parliament. Consequently, FFMC needs to take appropriate actions to preserve its long-term ability to maximize returns to fishers.

In addition to reduced demand and lower sales revenues from our customers, states of emergency and public health orders have been issued in all jurisdictions where we buy and process fish. The fishing industry and FFMC have been identified as critical businesses that can remain open and continue to operate. However, we must ensure compliance with government directives to maintain physical distancing at all of our facilities. Independent agencies, co-operatives and individual fishers are also required to maintain the same safe distancing protocols when catching, dressing and packing fish. This compliance obligates us to reduce the volume of fish we can purchase and process safely. The wellbeing of all FFMC stakeholders, particularly our fishers and employees are our highest priority.

FFMC is pursuing all market opportunities including retail distribution for fish products that we usually supply to the food service industry. These opportunities are showing some success. Nonetheless, given the overall reduced demand for our fish, for the foreseeable future, the Corporation will only be purchasing fish that can be readily sold to customers with confirmed requirements. For example, we are currently executing plans to accommodate a limited carp and mullet fishery in April and early May for which we have orders.

The overall fish procurement plan will be communicated through our field operations group as it is developed. At this time, the most likely scenario being generated is that we may buy limited quantities of lake whitefish, mullet, carp, tullibee and northern pike to support retail customers. We anticipate a recovery for restaurants when businesses are able to open again, but that recovery is expected to be slow. The longer-term uncertainty regarding the economic and subsequent recovery of the restaurant, hospitality and food-service industry indicates that we will not need to purchase large volumes of walleye until that industry shows sustained signs of improvement and demand increases. This scenario is subject to change depending on the strength and timing of the overall recovery from COVID-19.

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**is public-denied pursuant to section
est public-refusé en vertu de l'article**

68(a)

**of the Access to Information Act
de la Loi sur l'accès à l'information**