



Maw-lukutijik **Saqmaq**
Assembly of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaw Chiefs

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February 23rd, 2024

The Honourable Diane LeBouthillier
Minister of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
200 Kent ST, Station 15N100
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E6
Via Email: DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Dear Minister LeBouthillier,

Re: Response to Minister's Decision Regarding 2024 Elver Fishery

We are writing in response to your February 13 and 14, 2024, letters indicating your intention to not renew the elver licenses for the 2024 season. While we acknowledge the concerns raised regarding the management, enforcement, and sustainability of the elver fishery, we must express our disappointment in the lack of consideration given to the comprehensive proposal submitted by the eight Nova Scotia (NS) Mi'kmaw First Nations on December 7, 2023.

Our proposal addressed key issues such as:

- access and allocation expectations for the NS Mi'kmaq in 2024;
- safety and enforcement concerns; and
- measures to ensure the orderly management and sustainability of this important traditional species.

It is disappointing and disheartening that our proposal has not been given due consideration in your decision-making process.

Our communities and leadership have successfully demonstrated community-based Mi'kmaw governance and fisheries management over the past three years in the elver fishery. We have implemented and planned improvements in reporting, compliance, and traceability measures for 2024, showcasing our commitment to responsible fisheries management.

Over the past three years, it has become evident that supporting and creating space for Indigenous governance and Mi'kmaq-led fisheries management has been the most effective approach to increasing and respecting Indigenous participation in fisheries in the Maritimes region. This approach has also facilitated the accurate recording of Rights-based removals and traceability contributing to the sustainable management of fisheries resources.

Without an open and authorized fishery, the criminalization of Rights holders will persist, erasing all momentum gained over the past three years in educating and supporting the creation of a sustainable Mi'kmaq-led elver fishery. Our proposal demonstrates the First Nations' commitment to increased accountability to the American Eel, our people, and our Nation-to-Nation relationship.

We also want to recognize, support and acknowledge We'koqma'q's Aboriginal Communal Fishery for elvers, as this Band-owned fishery is different from a non-Indigenous commercial fishery. Fishing elvers is integral to the community's operations and eliminating this would cause devastating impacts to their community. In the event that DFO decides to proceed with a commercial fishery shutdown or an involuntary quota reallocation or reduction, we fully support an exemption being made for the We'koqma'q Aboriginal Communal fishery license.

As the collective eight undersigned Bands, we firmly believe that a collaborative approach to authorization and fisheries management is essential. Without it, Indigenous people will be left with no choice but to continue fishing their Rights, without the support and accountability of conservation-based management.

We respectfully ask for a response to our December 7th letter by March 8th, 2024, to ensure adequate preparation time for our community management and harvesters, and we would urge you to reconsider your decision to close the 2024 elver fishery and engage in meaningful dialogue with the Mi'kmaq to address our proposal. Together, we can work towards a sustainable and mutually beneficial solution for all fisheries, especially elvers.

Yours in Recognition of Mi'kmaw Rights and Title,

*Original letter submitted to Minister LeBouthillier contained Chiefs' signatures.
Signatures withdrawn in online version for security purposes.*

Chief Deborah Robinson
Wasoqopa'q First Nation

Chief Gerald Toney
Annapolis Valley First Nation

Chief Carol Potter
Bear River First Nation

Chief Leroy Denny
Eskasoni First Nation

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Chief Wilbert Marshall
Potlotek First Nation

Chief Annie Bernard-Daisley
We'koqma'q First Nation

Chief Tamara Young
Pictou Landing First Nation

Chief Sidney Peters
Glooscap First Nation

CC:

Jacinta Berthier, Regional Director, Fisheries Management Maritimes Region