

OPINION

## An ocean of opportunities are available for Canada's fisheries

The federal government needs to work more effectively with the fishing industry to realize our growth opportunities for Canadians while protecting our oceans and sustainably managing our fish resources.



Recent announcement by Fisheries and Oceans Minister Dominic LeBlanc about altering long-standing quota allocations will chill investment decisions, writes Paul Lansbergen. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

By PAUL LANSBERGEN - PUBLISHED :Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017 12:00 AM

At a time of great opportunity in Canada's fisheries sector, the industry faces unprecedented uncertainty and instability about government policy that is putting hundreds of millions of dollars of investment at risk. Those investments are needed to realize the industry's growth potential.

Canada's fisheries sector has great growth opportunities going forward. Export Development Canada has projected that fish and seafood exports will grow by seven per cent in 2018 over 2017, which itself, was six per cent higher than 2016. Exports to emerging markets, like China and South Korea, are driving this impressive growth. A secondary factor in the growth forecast is the immediate tariff removals under the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Europe. Why does this matter? The commercial fisheries sector is critical to the coastal, rural economies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

This growth will only be realized if Canada does the following two things: sustainably manage its fish resources, and create stable and hospitable conditions for industry investment. These two are intertwined and not independent of each other.

Proper sustainable management of our fish resources includes conserving and protecting our oceans and fish habitat. The fisheries sector and government agree on this point. Canada's fisheries are managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and are recognized internationally as a model for responsible fisheries management. The industry works closely with DFO and is committed to sustainability and stewardship. In addition, there are a number of programs and organizations that certify fisheries for sustainability. Among them, the Marine Stewardship Council is recognized as the "gold standard." In 2014, two-thirds of Canadian landings were from fisheries that have been certified to the MSC standard, which represents almost all major fish stocks and is more than 80 per cent of the value of Canada's fishery.

Dominic LeBlanc, minister of fisheries and oceans, has recently made pronouncements to alter long-standing quota allocations that chill investment decisions. This along with industry anxiety and concerns with changes to the Oceans Act (Bill C-55) and forthcoming amendments to the Fisheries Act are creating unprecedented insecurity and instability that are stalling investments.

Secure access and stable allocation shares are the foundation of resource stewardship. They enable the industry to take the long view, to put fish in the 'bank' to benefit from in the future, to collaborate and compromise with other participants. This long view makes it possible to compete in the global marketplace for seafood because we can invest in better vessels, more ecosystem-friendly gear, innovative technology, new market opportunities and higher-value products. This is what makes it possible to offer good and secure jobs for Canadians. This model can and does include a range of enterprises from small family businesses that service a local market to those that sell directly to domestic and international retailers and the foodservice sector. Over the last decade it increasingly includes Indigenous individuals, bands and nations.

The federal government needs to work more effectively with the fishing industry to find solutions in order to realize our growth opportunities for Canadians while protecting our oceans and sustainably managing our fish resources. The fisheries sector, through its national voice, the Fisheries Council of Canada, looks forward to real engagement with the minister, other Parliamentarians, and the government more broadly.

*Paul Lansbergen is president of the Fisheries Council of Canada.*

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