

MEDIA RELEASE



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

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Mi'kmaq Extremely Dissatisfied with Minister's Lack of Formal Consultation and Accountability in Elver Fishery Decision

Last night, Minister Lebouthillier announced that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) will not open the 2024 elver season, which, in turn, also means a non-renewal of the Kespukwitk Elver Harvest Document for the season. The Kespukwitk Mi'kmaw communities are frustrated with the decision, the lack of formal consultation and the clear disregard for Mi'kmaw Rights.

"It is DFO's responsibility to acknowledge and accommodate our inherent rights," said Chief Gerald Toney, Co-Lead of Fisheries for the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs. "Making this decision without formal consultation and involvement of the Mi'kmaq only demonstrates a lack of commitment to uphold our rights and undermines true reconciliation."

The Kespukwitk and other Mi'kmaw communities dedicated extensive efforts to developing a comprehensive plan for the sustainable harvesting of elvers, which could have helped establish a well-managed and sustainable fishery. Closing the fishery will not fully address concerns of unauthorized harvesting and inadequate enforcement measures and will only undermine efforts to achieve long-term sustainability.

"Shutting down the fishery is not going to make the problems go away," continued Chief Toney. There has to be a real plan for moving forward in a sustainable way. Ignoring the issues won't make it better."

The Chiefs feel that the failure of this fishery lies in DFO's inability to ensure accountability and recognize their own systemic shortcomings in the governance of fisheries management.

"The Minister must be held accountable for the lack of progress in improving conservation efforts and enforcing protective measures to safeguard the American Eel population. The actions of a few individuals who disregard policies and DFO's inability to oversee a safe and sustainable fishery should not adversely impact the Rights holders," said Chief Toney.

The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs remains committed to advocating for the rights and interests of Mi'kmaw harvesters and upholding the principles of environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

The Minister must prioritize consultation with Indigenous communities to develop inclusive and equitable fisheries management policies and reconsider the decision to withhold elver licenses for the 2024 season.

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