



**Fisheries and Aquaculture  
Office of the Minister**

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February 15, 2024

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier  
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard  
200 Kent Street  
Station 15N100  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E6

Dear Minister Lebouthillier:

I am writing to share my extreme disappointment with the recent management and enforcement of the elver fishery that has resulted in your February 13, 2024, announcement stating your intent to not open the fishery for the 2024 season. Should you proceed with this decision, there will be significant negative economic and social impacts to Nova Scotia's commercial elver industry and the communities that they support.

I realize that the issues associated with this fishery are complex, but this is not a new development. Problems in this fishery are well-documented, and they have been building for several seasons. And, in spite of repeated calls from my Department for increased enforcement and prosecutions to curtail the poaching activities, there are no tangible results that indicate your Department is protecting the resource and harvesters, both commercial and indigenous, from illegal activities on the rivers and throughout the black-market value chain. Continued DFO inaction on this file, and this proposed closure, will have no impact on illegal harvesting. The only foreseeable outcome from this proposed closure is financial hardship inflicted upon our law-abiding license-holders.

Regardless of whether there is a 2024 fishing season or not, I am requesting that for the future of the elver / eel stocks, the future potential of the elver fisheries, and for the safety of Nova Scotians, there be a concerted and appreciable increase of enforcement activities on Nova Scotia's rivers starting with this year's elver season and moving forward for all future elver seasons.

I would also like to highlight the need for specific enforcement focus on the East River in Chester, Nova Scotia where industry has been carrying out the Elver Index of Abundance Study. This study plays an important role in benefiting our province by furnishing essential scientific evidence that is crucial for shaping future management decisions and, quite possibly, safeguarding the continued existence of the \$46 million elver fishery. Incidents of vandalism at the study site in 2020 have severely disrupted the research. Subsequent unauthorized fishing activities in the years following near the study area have further impeded the ability to continue this critical study.

As always, our provincial conservation officers from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables are available to support DFO's Compliance and Protection officers on any joint operational planning activities and enforcement actions. I understand that there have already been conversations between our respective enforcement agencies and would encourage continued collaboration on this and other enforcement-related issues.

In addition to my stated request for more enforcement activities outlined above, I would also urge that you strongly consider the perspectives of all the stakeholders that you are engaging to understand the full impacts of the proposed closure of the 2024 season. I would also ask that your department fully engage the commercial elver industry in a timely manner on the go forward fisheries management approaches (quota shares and new access) for the future of the elver fishery in 2025 and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'John A.', written in a cursive style.

Honourable Kent Smith, E.C.N.S.

- c. Mike Kelloway, MP, Parliamentary Secretary Fisheries Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard  
Hon. Tory Rushton, Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables  
Doug Wentzell, Regional Director General, Fisheries and Oceans