

For Immediate Release

February 13, 2024

(Tantallon, NS) – Today the Hon. Diane Lebovillier, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, sent a letter to all licensed elver harvesters to propose the closure of the upcoming elver season. On behalf of CCSEF members, President Genna Carey issued the following statement:

After years of pleading with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to recognize their failures related to the elver industry, today Minister Lebovillier informed license holders she was choosing to support poachers and biker gangs rather than legal elver fishers.

No one understands the challenges of the elver industry better than the 200+ people who legally work in the industry. What we don't understand is how we are the people the minister is choosing to punish for her Department's failures.

Elvers are crucial to supplying near-insatiable aquaculture operations in China. That has turned Maritime rivers into battlegrounds where illegal, unlicensed fishers and buyers operate with impunity, using biker gangs and others to employ violence and intimidation to safeguard their illicit profits.

Preventing legal fishers from doing their jobs will have almost no effect on poachers or Chinese buyers. They will still be there illegally harvesting elvers. In some ways their jobs will be easier without legal fishers watching what they're doing. If DFO thinks they have the resources to police the fishery without the legal harvesters, how is the opposite not also true?

CCSEF has been begging DFO for more than two years to take serious steps to address the issues in the fishery. We participated in their sham review and even offered to pay for a traceability system, all to end up losing our livelihoods for our trouble.

If the Minister closes the 2024 elver season she is choosing to support transnational organized crime – Chinese companies buying from illegal poachers protected by biker gangs – rather than honest, hardworking Canadians who have legally fished elvers for 30+ years, paid their taxes and supported their local communities.

That is a garbage decision that any Canadian government should be embarrassed to make.

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