



Fisheries Council of Canada
Conseil Canadien des Pêches

FOOD SECTOR LABOUR

Overview

As a result of several compounding factors including the pandemic and an aging workforce, labour shortages have been becoming more prevalent in the food sector and beyond. The Canadian seafood industry is no exception, and is finding it increasingly difficult to find sufficient labour for harvesting and processing. It is expected that the sector will require over 7,300 new hires to fill vacancies caused by both expansion and replacement (retirements and deaths) between 2023 and 2030.

Employers have also been faced with increases to premium rates to Employment Insurance (EI) due to government programs offered to aid workers during the pandemic. It is a welcome sight that Budget 2024 outlined a potential decrease in the EI premium from \$1.66 to \$1.62 remaining constant through to 2031.

Seafood is a cornerstone of the Canadian economy and supports rural and Indigenous communities along our three coasts. It is important for government and industry to collaborate on solutions that address these issues and boost the labour pool for these key food sectors. Consideration should also be given to strengthening the Temporary Foreign Workers program for both seasonal and year-round positions.

Objective

Ensure the Canadian seafood industry is engaged in consultations surrounding labour concerns and in EI reform discussions.

Key Messages

1. Addressing labour concerns is paramount to ensure the Canadian seafood industry can remain a strong foundation for the Canadian economy and food supply chain.
2. Focus should be placed on programs that entice skilled workers to join food sector industries, and that seasonal and year-round positions are supported.
3. Employers should not be responsible to pay increased premiums to pay off a deficit incurred due to government pandemic-related decisions.
4. Supporting the TFW program to address the labour gaps and advocate for programs to facilitate TFW pathways to permanent residency.



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Background & Facts

The Fisheries Council of Canada (FCC) is actively engaged in advocacy to support our members in the face of ongoing labour shortages, but more work is needed to find permanent solutions.

In January of 2022, the Fisheries Council of Canada joined a labour coalition spearheaded by Food and Beverage Canada (FBC) to advocate for an Emergency Foreign Worker Program to address the labour issues in the short-term and secure relief for industry's labour pressures. As a result of the hard work of the coalition, a series of unprecedented changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program were made, which included: the removal of the limit to the number of low-wage positions that employers in seasonal industries, such as fish and seafood processing, can fill through the TFW Program; an increase of valid Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIAs) to 18 months; and the ability for employers in certain sectors to hire up to 30% of their workforce through the TFW Program for low-wage positions for one year. However, in March 2024 these changes were peeled back, specifically the 30% was reduced to 20%, and LMIAs will only be valid for 6 months. These announcements were deeply disappointing not only to our sector, but many within the food and beverage manufacturing sectors. FCC signed on to a joint news release with FBC and others from the labour coalition expressing our disappointment.

FCC members recognize the use of TFWs is a last resort. It is also expensive. But, unfortunately, in many coastal locations, the reality is an undeniable labour shortage. FCC is a member of a working group focusing on Immigration and Foreign Workers with the goal of developing a long-term solution to facilitate the entry of foreign workers and new Canadians into Canada's agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors.

The sector is working to attract more Canadians and permanent residents. We have partnered with Food Processing Skills Canada to promote their new suite of programming aimed at improving the food processing sector's overall skills. FCC launched a careers and labour social media campaign earlier this year. Additionally, FCC has Canada's only seafood-industry professional development program, Future Leaders Canada. In partnership with the National Fishing Institute in the United States, the program is open to any seafood sector employee who is interested in gaining a fulsome understanding of the workings of the industry.

These measures are an example of the work that needs to be completed to begin addressing long-term labour concerns. Support from federal and provincial governments is needed to ensure our food sectors remain competitive in the global market.