

Statement on the Maltreatment of Mi'kmaq by DFO Officers

April 17, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"Three weeks ago, two young Mi'kmaq fishers were detained by DFO officers, their phones and shoes confiscated. They were made to walk some distance in the dark, with only shirts wrapped around their feet to protect them from the elements. I drew attention to this inhumane treatment during Question Period in the Senate on April 9, 2024.

This past weekend, Sipekne'katik community member James WS Nevin reported that he was brutally attacked and maced by DFO officers for suspicious activity. He had not been fishing, was maced, tackled to the ground and had his hands bound by zipties. All without any evidence of wrongdoing.

This cannot continue to happen.

DFO officers are peace officers, whose mandate, per the DFO website, includes a directive to, "collect evidence of illegal activity during routine patrols and special investigations to use in court." They are meant to negotiate with suspected illegal fishers and the suitability requirements include the ability to "confront and de-escalate situations before the use of force is necessary". This is not happening.

In 2019, the DFO-Coast Guard Reconciliation Strategy was released and it clearly states a commitment to,

Recognize and implement Indigenous and treaty rights related to fisheries, oceans, aquatic habitat, and marine waterways in a manner consistent with section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the federal Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

25 years after the landmark *Marshall* decision, this is not happening in Nova Scotia.

A public investigation is a start, but it is not enough. No Canadian citizen deserves to be treated this way. In order to avoid further incidents or any escalation in public frustration over these acts of mistreatment and abuse of power, we must restore peace between the DFO and community members. That is why I am calling on DFO to:

- Immediately place the DFO officers involved on administrative leave pending a full investigation;
- Initiate mandatory training on appropriate use of force, investigative approaches, and de-escalation techniques;
- Initiate a third-party, independent review with Mi'kmaq involvement into the conduct of officers involved in both instances; and
- To use the Senate recommendations in their report, *Peace on the Water*, as a pathway to the appropriate co-management of the fisheries in Nova Scotia.

I believe that there is a peaceful path forward, but that we cannot begin down that road until we resolve the growing mistrust between Mi'kmaq and DFO.

Quick Links:

- Sen. Prosper's QP Intervention, April 9, 2024 - https://sencanada.ca/en/content/sen/chamber/441/debates/189db_2024-04-09-e#38
- "Become a Fishery Officer" - <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/career-carriere/fishery-officers-agents-des-peches/index-eng.htm>
- DFO-Coast Guard Reconciliation Strategy - <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/library-bibliotheque/40947208.pdf>
- *Peace on the Water* - <https://sencanada.ca/en/info-page/parl-44-1/pofo-peace-on-the-water-advancing-the-full-implementation-of-mi-kmaq-wolastoqiyik-and-peskotomuhkati-rights-based-fisheries/>
- The *Marshall* decisions - <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/aboriginal-autochtones/moderate-livelihood-subsistence-convenable/marshall-overview-apercu-eng.html>

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