

Herring Fishery Collapses on Canada's Pacific Coast

Iconic forage fish population succumbs to decades of overfishing and mismanagement by Federal Authorities



Vancouver, British Columbia Mar 23, 2022 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - [Photos/Videos](#)

The Pacific Herring fishery on the west coast of North America has collapsed, joining the Atlantic Cod in the annals of Canadian fisheries mismanagement. Conservancy Hornby Island (CHI), a community-based organization that has been calling for a moratorium on the Strait of Georgia herring fishery for the past 5 years with the support of many First Nations and environmental organizations and the public, has declared the fishery defunct. The Northern Gulf Islands region, the epicenter, and barometer of the commercial fishery has failed to see a healthy return of herring to its critical spawning beaches this spring and the commercial fishing industry has struggled to reach 50% of a quota already cut in half by the Minister of Fisheries, Joyce Murray.

“Normally, Hornby and Denman Islands are the epicenter of the last remaining herring spawn. This year, it's just been a catastrophe. What I do know for sure is that I haven't seen this limited and short duration of spawn in my 20 years of looking out over Lambert Channel. It's a sad story” stated Grant Scott, a

retired commercial fisherman, and chair of CHI, who now advocates for herring conservation from his home on Hornby Island.

The Strait of Georgia (SoG) herring stock is the last remaining of five major B.C. herring stocks on Canada's west coast. Fisheries managers have been flirting too close to the limit for nearly a decade, this year going past the point of no return, despite a reduced quota.

The primary goal of the fishery is to extract the mature eggs to be sold mainly to Japan as a delicacy. The remains of the females and all of the males, which is about 90% of the harvested biomass, are not used for human consumption but for pet food and salmon farm feed.

CHI and its allies are now calling on Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Minister Joyce Murray to place an immediate halt to any further fishing, as the gillnet component of the fishery remains open despite stalling catch numbers and failure to reach this year's heavily reduced quota during the prolonged opening.

Even after Minister Murray reduced the quota from 20% to 10% of the predicted biomass the herring fishers could only find and catch 4,300 tons of their 7,850-ton quota. "Continuing this spring fishery is against the key principle of the Oceans Act — the precautionary principle. The last tiny spot spawns must be left as they will be critical to understanding and rebuilding our diverse coastal stocks," stated Dr. Briony Penn, a herring advocate, author, and Professor at the University of Victoria. She went on to say, "From Victoria to Haida Gwaii, coastal communities are experiencing a Silent Spring, up and down the coast and now the last spawn is on the brink".

Eric Pelkey, Hereditary Chief of Tsawout, WSÁNEĆ Nation who was encouraged by Minister Murray's recent interest in Pacific herring conservation, is disappointed that calls to end the fishery have fallen on deaf ears: "We are saddened that the Minister did not heed WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council's requests to implement a much-needed moratorium on the herring fishery. Without herring, we will have nothing. And eventually, you will have nothing. Everything will be just a memory."

Despite DFO's claims that their management of herring follows a precautionary approach, leading scientists outside of the Fisheries Ministry to disagree. Dr. Daniel Pauly, Professor of Fisheries at UBC explains "Imagine if you have a fishery, such as we have in the Strait of Georgia that is relentless and a big fishery...it can reduce it to nothing. And at that point, the stock might not recover... The predators that depend [on herring] will themselves be endangered. So the herring and all these animals that contribute to Beautiful British Columbia will be gone. And then we can shorten the [slogan] to British Columbia because the Beautiful part will not be there."

A recent report authored by DFO Scientist Emeritus Dr. John Neilson, identified the Northern Gulf Islands (using DFO data) as the most important area on the entire BC Coast for Pacific Herring, home to

half of the remaining critical spawning grounds in the Strait of Georgia. This year, despite the appearance of some spawn, few herring returned and only 3 of the dozen DFO-recognized critical spawning sites were active in the Northern Strait of Georgia, according to Notices during the fishery, spawn surveys, and reports by fishermen. With herring being repeat spawners that home back to their natal sites, a lack of spawn one year can lead to the wiping out of future generations of herring, as has occurred in the southern portion of the Strait of Georgia and other regions of the west coast of Canada in recent years.

“With Gillnetters still looking for opportunities and barely half of the heavily reduced quota yet attained, it is clear DFO continues business as usual managing this fishery to extinction,” stated Locky MacLean, ocean conservationist and circumnavigator who hails from the Northern Gulf Islands. “DFO claims they are running a sustainable fishery yet estimate peak herring by hiring commercial fishing vessels to find the fish. They seem to find a lot of fish on the sonar and on paper, playing with the numbers and measuring the same dwindling fish as they move around. The fact is herring populations continue to trend downwards year on year. DFO may only close the fishery once there are no herring left to catch.”

Pacific Herring populations once stretched from California to the Beaufort Sea and Hokkaido in Japan. Conservancy Hornby Island Executive Director Cath Gray states: “There is an urgent need for Canada to implement a fishery moratorium and herring recovery program to protect herring populations and bring them back to historic high population levels”. Joining with The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council, representing Tsartlip, Tsawout and Tseycum First Nations, who are also concerned the herring cannot survive another season of “business as usual”, the call for a moratorium is echoed by 53 towns, cities and districts of the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC), 63+ NGOs and businesses, leading environmentalists such as Dr. David Suzuki and close to 200,000 petition supporters.

[Photos/Videos](#)

NOTES TO MEDIA:

All media credit: Courtesy of Conservancy Hornby Island

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About Conservancy Hornby Island:

Established in 1991, Conservancy Hornby Island (CHI) is a volunteer organization formed to undertake and support local and regional conservation projects to benefit Hornby Island's land and marine environments. Each year, CHI hosts HerringFest, a gathering of art, music, and renowned speakers which celebrates the annual herring spawn and engages scientists, environmentalists, First Nations participants, and local communities in provocative discussions to help protect Pacific Herring.

ADDITIONAL INFO:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjyMi5x9v2AhXpzTgGHXcRAuMQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cbc.ca%2Fnews%2Fcanada%2Fbritish-columbia%2Fpacific-herring-fisheries-closure-1.6289030&usg=AOvVaw2i0RvOVzb1sC3B2Dml2AYz>

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjyMi5x9v2AhXpzTgGHXcRAuMQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cbc.ca%2Fnews%2Fcanada%2Fbritish-columbia%2Fpacific-herring-fisheries-closure-1.6289030&usg=AOvVaw2i0RvOVzb1sC3B2Dml2AYz>

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<https://mayneconservancy.ca/pacific-herring-fisheries/>

<https://olyopen.com/2021/12/17/canadian-federal-government-announces-closure-of-most-pacific-herring-fisheries-cbc-news/>

Supporting INFO:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/pacific-herring-fisheries-closure-1.6289030>

Conservancy Hornby Island's HerringFest
2021 <https://www.conservancyhornbyisland.org/herringfest2021>

DFO IFMP
DRAFT <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7vwr001z04igla1/AACJGCKSSnJBwfgvsm5DIplKa?dl=0>

Let the Herring Live Forum: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF4ktK58wNPw8k0acct-vkA>

UBC Report:

<https://www.miragenews.com/q-a-rebuilding-depleted-canadian-fish-stocks-is-good-business/>

CHI Herring MPA Report by Dr. John
Neilson:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ceed4a82de8d3000179e32f/t/5fbaf97a60ed88028be70323/1606089181161/CHI+Herring+MPA+Report+Final.pdf>

Pacific Herring Natal Homing report by Tony Pitcher
(NEW): <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rspb.2020.2398>

Oceana Canada Fishery Audit 2020:

<https://fisheryaudit.ca/>

Petition for Herring Fishery Moratorium:

<https://www.change.org/p/mp-jonathan-wilkinson-minister-fisheries-and-oceans-canada-say-no-to-pacific-herring-roe-fishery>

Conservancy Hornby Island's Herring Campaign: <https://www.conservancyhornbyisland.org/herring>

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