

Fisheries and Aquaculture

Questions and Answers

1. Why has the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (Department) decided to proceed with lifting the 2018 moratorium on issuing new licences and adding species to existing licences?

The moratorium was intended to be temporary and has been in place since January 2018 while the Department has conducted a review of its licencing regime. This review is now complete.

Extensive industry engagement has informed the Department's approach to lift the moratorium in a responsible way. Engagement included meetings with the Nova Scotia Seafood Processors Advisory Committee (NSSPAC), individual seafood industry associations, individual licence holders, and the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

Ending the licence moratorium will support sector growth and innovation. Existing licence holders will have the flexibility they need to take advantage of new opportunities and adapt to changing global markets.

2. When will you start accepting applications for new licences?

Applications will be accepted starting on August 1, 2025, for all species except for lobster buying and snow crab buying and processing. We will start accepting lobster buying and snow crab buying and processing applications on January 2, 2026.

Until the moratorium is lifted, the Department will continue to accept applications to reissue licences.

3. Will the application process for a buyers/processors licence change? What will be different?Requirement for Professional Business Plan:

As of August 1, 2025, all applicants for new licences and species additions to existing licences, will be required to submit a professional business plan. Some typical components of a business plan include company description, products, management plan, industry analysis, sales and marketing plan, human resources plan, operations plan, and financial plan.

Business plans will be reviewed for reasonableness. The Nova Scotia Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board will lend their expertise in reviewing the financial information of the application. The Department is developing new application forms and an external guide for developing a business plan which will be shared with industry prior to August 1, 2025.

Additional information requirements for lobster buying and snow crab buying and processing:

Applicants for lobster buying and snow crab buying and processing licences are expected to submit additional information, and applications will go through additional assessment. Lobster processing applications will not be subject to additional assessment. Details will be shared with industry prior to accepting applications on January 2, 2026.

4. The lifting of the licencing moratorium is part of completing a licencing policy review – has this review been completed? What else is changing under this review? Can it be shared?

The licencing policy review has been completed. This included a review of legislation, regulations, and the licencing system for fish buyers and processors in the province.

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The *Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act* was revised in Spring 2024, increasing the maximum fine amount, from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 for first offences, and up to \$2,000,000 for second and subsequent offences.

Earlier this year, new licence conditions and other changes were implemented. They include:

- Increasing effective period of licences, from 1 year to 2 years
- Making annual employment survey participation mandatory
- Establishing notification requirements when a licence holder or its shareholders has been charged or convicted of a fisheries-related offence
- Removing depuration facility requirements for soft-shell clam processors
- Increasing reporting requirements for lobster buyers, including requirements to record and report weight of dead loss, and report purchases from other buyers and sales
- Requiring Fish Processing licence holders to align with CFIA's Safe Food for Canadians (SFC) regulations through possession of a SFC Record of Licence and appropriate SFC licence details at the time of processing.
- Requiring elver buyers to own or lease an elver holding facility in Nova Scotia, limiting the buyers to using those facilities specified on the licence, and maintaining a valid possession licence issued by Fisheries and Oceans Canada ('DFO') for each facility

Additional changes to the regulations are forthcoming and must receive formal approval to come into effect. Changes are designed to ensure we have a modern, safe, and enforceable licence system for fish buying and processing in Nova Scotia.

5. Why has the Department decided to accept new licence applications for groundfish species now?

The moratorium on groundfish Buying and Processing licences was established in 1994 in response to declining groundfish resources and the DFO groundfish moratorium.

At the time, it was believed that there was not enough resource to sustain viable groundfish operations and, therefore, adding new capacity was not in the best interest of the industry. Since this time, a lot has changed in Nova Scotia's fish processing industry. The Department recognizes that there are opportunities in groundfish in 2025 and the licencing moratorium is impeding these opportunities.

The Department is aware of the concerns of existing groundfish operators and intends to ensure any new entrant is qualified and operates in the best interest of the industry.